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Mystery Magazine

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a NEW crime-detective story by

ROBERT McNEAR

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Beware the spell of The Green Gorevan, the irresistible call of the Sixteenth Century Oriental rug . . .

THE GREEN GOREVAN

by ROBERT McNEAR

THERE WAS AN AMUSING ANGLE to the caper at The Gold Coast Towers, one that was duly reported in the newspapers and caused much snickering around town. It seemed that the burglars had no sooner finished stacking Mrs. Stanley Warburton's rugs out in the twelfth-floor hall when Mrs. George Murch, who lived with her husband in the other apartment on the same floor, arrived on the scene. Thinking that the men were rug cleaners (she told police later they had something *like* Acme Rug Cleaners on their uniforms), she mentioned to them that her own rugs hadn't been cleaned in ages and would they take them along too? To this suggestion the burglars were most agreeable.

Several weeks passed and Mrs. Murch, who was tired of walking

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around on bare flooors, attempted to make contact with the rug cleaners. The phone book did not list a rug-cleaning firm named Acme, or one with a similar name; so at a loss about what to do she phoned Mrs. Warbuton in Palm Beach, where that lady often visited, and inquired as to the name of her rug cleaners. The silence on the other end of the phone was so monstrous that Mrs. Murch could clearly hear the rustle of Palm fronds and the slap of surf on sand. After Mrs. Warburton could bring herself to speak, a horrified Mrs. Murch called the police, and the next day the papers were full of it. *Two Hauls of Priceless Oriental Rugs,* announced the press.

The doorman at The Gold Coast Towers thought the whole affair hilarious. "Guess they'll have to get wall-to-wall like the rest of us peasants," he remarked to the janitor—beg pardon, the maintenance engineer.

The two insurance companies involved did not think it hilarious, or even funny. When first insured, the rugs had been valuable enough, but escalation clauses in the policies, reflecting the rising market in Orientals, had increased their replacement cost considerably. As matters stood now, the company holding the policy on the Murches would have to make good on five rugs with a total value of $60,000. Even less lucky was the company protecting Mrs. Warburton, for her missing rugs, numbering eight, would set them back $240,000 for the lot.

Faced with this bad news, and hoping to cut their losses, the two companies turned to an insurance investigation firm specializing in antiques, the category under which Oriental Rugs fell. This firm assigned the case to one of its ablest members, Henry Cartan, whose savvy in sleuthing was exceeded only by his knowledge of things antique.

Henry knew that the burglars or their fence would not find it easy to unload such distinctive loot; so in order to get a line on the missing property he decided to circularize full descriptions to art galleries, museums, and private collectors. But to do this he would have to interview the former owners, for he knew that no two old Oriental rugs were exactly the same, and he needed to know their individual characteristics, peculiarities of color, and so on. With this in mind he phoned the unhappy rich at The Gold Coast Towers and made appointments for the day after the burglaries had been discovered.

The door at the Murch apartment was opened by George Murch himself, a man whose reputation was that of a self-made, ruthless corporate raider. He came right to the point. "I want those damn rugs found."

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"Our d e e - v i n e Orientals," wailed Mrs. Murch, joining her husband. She said dee-vine with the accent on the first syllable, in the manner of a society lady in the movies. "Honestly, I must be the stupidest woman alive to have invited those burglars in."

"You can say that again," said Mr. Murch.

Henry asked them to tell him about the rugs, which they did, Mr. Murch, naturally, went first. He told how much they had cost and where they had been purchased. Then Mrs. Murch vaguely described them by color and pattern and identified them by names which she badly mispronounced. Obviously, this example of *nouveaux riches* was not up to fine Orientals, thought Henry. Yet the haul had been impressive. The stolen Murch rugs, all named for their place of origin, were a Joshaghan, a Bijar, an Afshari, a Baluchistan, and a Bahktiari.

As he had been taking notes, Henry looked around the apartment. The floor in the room where he stood was bare. The obvious suggested itself. "The rugs were kept on the floor?" he asked.

"Where the hell do you think we'd put them?" said Mr. Murch. "In the broom closet?

"Mr. Murch, rugs of high quality should be hung on walls. Why, high heels alone—"

"Where I come from rugs are meant for walking on."

"But these were s e m i - antique—"

"*Semi,*" said Mr. Murch, his voice rising. "What do you mean by *semi?*"

"Technically to qualify for antique status a rug must have been woven not earlier than one hundred years ago."

"Look here," s h o u t e d the enraged corporate r a i d e r. "There was nothing *semi* about those rugs. They were genuine antiques. Don't you think I know an antique when I see one? What do you think I am? Some sort of—"

A few moments later a pleasant relief opened Mrs. Warburton's door—a uniformed maid who was small and Florida-tanned. As she led Henry back to the kitchen, her pert derriére swinging nicely, she talked to him over her shoulder. "We just got back from Florida today, Mrs. Warburton will be with you in a minute. Call me Sally."

She nodded at an open door. Henry saw heavy leather furniture, and hunting and fishing trophies on three walls. "My favorite rug was there," she said. On the fourth wall there was a long rectangular space, lighter in color, where a rug had been hanging.

"That was the rug that killed Mr. Warburton," she said, pouring him coffee in the kitchen.

"Killed Mr. Warburton?"

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"Fell on him about a year ago. He was a small man and he smothered under it. Mrs. Warburton had the rug put back up, but she has never been in the room since."

"Well, I suppose," said Henry, eyeing the attractive maid, "if you're a rug connoisseur and you gotta go, there's no better way."

"It was such a beautiful rug," she said. "I used to spend a lot of time just looking at it. It was green—I'll never forget that green."

Enter Mrs. Stanley Warburton, who swept into the room with all the unobstrusiveness of a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. A large woman, expensively and expansively tanned, she got right down to business. "My late husband," she announced, "wouldn't touch a rug woven after 1859. Of course, that was when some of them started using synthetic dyes instead of vegetable dyes."

She pointed out the walls where the stolen rugs had hung, described each rug precisely, and pronounced each name correctly. The collection would have done credit to a museum. All more than a century old, they included a Turak and a Dirmirdji from Turkey; a Ghiordes Prayer Rug, a Kabistan and a Baku from the Caucasus; a Seventeenth Century Hunting Carpet, a Feraghan, and a Bakshis from Persia.

"Thank you, Mr. Cartan," she said at the door. "I would much prefer getting my rugs back than the insurance money."

"We'll do our best, Mrs. Warburton. But haven't you forgotten a rug? The one in the library?" The one that had killed your husband, he nearly added.

"Mr. Cartan, I had eight insured rugs. I have described all eight to you."

Henry consulted the appraisal forms on the margins of which he had taken notes. Yes, she had described eight. "The rug in the library wasn't insured?" he asked.

"Goodbye, Mr. Cartan. Thank you for coming."

The door closed on Henry, leaving him to ponder the matter of the uninsured rug. Presumably its value was comparable with the others—about $30,000. Then an interesting thought came to him. By the very act of insuring an article, attention is called to it, and even more so if it ends up as an insurance claim. Therefore, a valuable piece of property, especially a distinctive one, might not be insured if the owner did not want attention called to it—if, for example, it had been previously stolen from someone else.

Now Henry was a curious animal. Though his job dictated concern for Mrs. Warburton's eight insured rugs, he became exceedingly curious about the one not insured—the green rug that had killed Mr. Warburton.

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Sally, the maid, had said it had been her favorite rug; she had spent much time looking at it. He would phone her that night and ask her out. Perhaps she could describe it to him in more detail.

On the way home he bought a newspaper. There were two big stories on the front page. They concerned the rug burglaries at The Gold Coast Towers and the annual opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway.

In 1892 a Chicago meat packer, upon returning from the Grand Tour, showed a photograph of the Chateau de Jesselin in Brittany to an architect, saying, "Build it." And so it was—in the hard coin of the day, for $1,000,000, on a choice lot on Prairie Avenue. The meat-packer's neighbors, none of whom was modest about his own housing, were railroad kings, grain brokers, and department-store owners.

It was all very grand. But 1892 did not last forever, and now Prairie Avenue was the wrong part of town. Most of the big houses were gone—parking lots, freight sheds, and warehouses had taken their place; but the meat-packer's palace still stands, apparently uninhabited and empty, though in truth it is neither. Edgar Henderson lives there, and the house is filled with stolen merchandise.

Liquor, television sets, furs, cameras, electrical appliances, radios, wrist watches, rugs.

The rugs had come the day before, and the men, carrying them up the steep stairs to the old third-floor ballroom, had laughed between gasps for breath over the dumb broad at The Gold Coast Towers who had insisted that they take hers along too. While the men were lugging the rugs upstairs, Edgar Henderson was talking to his uncle.

"When the Saint Lawrence Seaway opens in a little while," the uncle was saying, "we'll send them to Europe. They're too hot to peddle around here, and besides, we can get a better price for them over there."

"They must be very new and valuable," said Edgar, who knew nothing of such matters.

"Old and valuable," said the uncle. "Edgar, you graduate from college this June. Right?"

Edgar nodded.

"Hate to lose you to the business world, boy. You've been a good watchdog. But I've paid you okay and it got you through college. I promised your parents —bless both of them—that I'd take care of you."

That night, after eating a TV dinner in a room containing more than a thousand cases of Scotch whiskey, Edgar had gone up the stairs to look at the rugs. They were rolled up, piled on top of

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each other. He took one from the top, unrolled it, and was astonished by its beauty. He unrolled another rug, and then another, and when he went to bed that night his head was filled with them. Schoolwork would take him to the public library the next day, and he determined to take out a book on rugs.

The book, entitled *Oriental Rugs,* was written by John Kimberly Mumford and published in 1910. With its elaborate descriptions and color plates it seemed the definitive work on the subject. At night Edgar would take the book up to the third-floor ballroom and read, from time to time going to the stacked rugs and examining one, checking a color plate against it, identifying a particular knot, pattern, or symbol. The rugs fascinated him. When he returned to the library he took out more books on the subject.

Now, Edgar Henderson was a bright guy and it was not long before he was extremely knowledgeable about Oriental rugs—knowledgeable, and much puzzled by two things. The first was that all the rugs were not the same in age or value. He believed that five of them had been woven in this century and had been actually used as floor rugs. On the other hand, nine of them had been woven at least a hundred years or more ago. These nine were truly museum pieces and had seen little wear. It was as if two different collections were involved. Naturally, Edgar was correct about this, but at this point he could only make deductions, since Mrs. Murch had not yet become anxious about her dee-vine Orientals that she thought were being cleaned, and the twin burglaries were still unreported.

But these surmises were minor compared to the question raised by one of the fourteen rugs. This was the matter of the green silk rug, the one that he could not readily identify as to name and place of origin. The rug was truly breathtaking. Its dimensions, which he had carefully measured, were a large, though not freakish, 12 feet 6 inches by 22 feet 4 inches. The rug was finely knotted and thin—characteristics of rugs woven in the Southern Caucasus; but unlike a rug from that region the colors were not predominately cream, red, and blue. The principal color was green—a light, bright, wild green! There were also greens of darker tones, and some yellows and browns, but the bright green dominated.

The circular medallion in the center of the rug was more floral than formal, suggesting a Persian rug, and the presence of the so-called Herati design—a rosette between two curved leaves—seemed to confirm that its place of origin

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was not only Persia but Northern Persia.

But was it really from there? The presence of the swastika was perplexing. Though the swastika was a symbol found in many ancient cultures it was more apt to be found in the Caucasus. And then there were the trees. Cypress trees, Edgar believed, and he researched the meaning of the cypress tree in antiquity. He learned that they decorated the tombs of the dead, and that Mohammedans believed that cypress boughs left on tombs continued to mourn. To add to the confusion, the main border was blue with a turtle design—characteristics of rugs woven in Gorevan, in the Tabriz district of Northern Persia. And at the foot of the rug there was Arabic writing.

Edgar pored over an atlas. Persia and the Caucasus adjoined each other. The influence of one region was often reflected in the rugs of an adjoining region, and his studies told him that exact pinpointing of origin could be arbitrary—nomad tribes, for instance, had carried their skills elsewhere, so similar rugs woven at different times could come from places of origin that were far apart. Nevertheless, he finally came up with an answer. There was one characteristic of the rug that was associated with only one place—that was the turtle design unique to Gorevan, the town in Northern Persia. So he christened the masterpiece "The Green Gorevan."

He liked the sound of that. He often said the words to himself and the words and rug began to grow on him. In the mornings he went off to college, a green splendor draped in his mind. Concentration on his studies became increasingly difficult. Like many students, he played the field, dating several girls rather than one. In time, though, he phased them out. There was another attraction for him at night.

"At all times the joint must look deserted, boy," his uncle had warned him; so at night Edgar moved about the house by flashlight, shielding it carefully. Up in the third-floor ballroom the windows were large, facing the street and courtyard. He had the windows covered with black satin sheets taken from stolen merchandise on the second floor. With the sheets in place he felt secure in turning on the one light, a crystal chandelier from which he had unscrewed all but a single bulb.

The other rugs he had stacked in the corner to make room for "The Green Gorevan," which he had spread out on the floor. He moved the card table up to the ballroom, and here he would have dinner. Usually he did not finish his meal, for the rug seemed to call him, asking him to come to

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it; and after taking off his shoes he would walk on the green silk, lustrous and shimmering, and through his socks he thought he could feel the rug pulsating, moving, heaving slightly up and down, like a living thing gently breathing; and standing there on the rug he kept wondering: *Where am I? Where am I?*

Spring vacation came and he was glad. On the first day he had an idea. There was one aspect of the rug that he had not investigated—the Arabic writing. His research suggested that it was probably the signature of the weaver—perhaps a date, a motto, or a combination. Painstakingly he copied the writing in a letter to an Iranian student of his acquaintance, Irim, who lived at the International House at the University. Could you translate this, he asked, and phone me at the above number?

That evening he mailed the letter on South Michigan Avenue, then picked up a paper from a newsstand. On the front page there was a picture of Chicago's mayor, beaming and jovial, at a dockside welcome to a ship captain who had brought the first ship into port since the seaway's spring thaw. So they would soon be taking the rugs away, he thought, and he started for home. He had only gone a few steps when another story on the front page brought him to a standstill. The rug burglaries had been discovered; so there *had* been two.

His eyes raced down the newspaper. Thirteen rugs had been taken from two apartments. But that was wrong! There were fourteen rugs in the ballroom. Further down, the story listed the rugs by name. Nowhere on the list was there a Gorevan, or a rug that could possibly be a Gorevan.

Edgar hurried home. As he let himself in the back door he heard the basement phone ringing. It was his uncle.

"Edgar, remember those rugs in the ballroom?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, I wonder if you could run up there and take a nose count."

"Sure. Why?"

"I thought the haul was fourteen—we counted them in the truck—but the paper tonight lists only thirteen. I don't know. Maybe we counted wrong."

"I'll go upstairs and count," Edgar said. "Hang on."

But he didn't bother to go upstairs. In the last few minutes, since he had seen the list in the newspaper, a not-so-idle thought had been running through his mind. For some reason the strange green rug had not been reported stolen. The thought: all circumstances considered, "The Green Gorevan" was his.

"Thirteen, Uncle," he said after

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an appropriate wait.

"Yeah? Well, I guess we counted wrong. Edgar, the boys will be there tomorrow night. They're going to put the rugs in crates and get them over to the ship in the harbor. Give them a hand, will you?"

"Tomorrow night, Uncle."

"Tomorrow night, Edgar. You know there was a funny thing about our hit on the Warburton apartment. Years ago Stanley Warburton was in the rackets. His name then was Sid Warton. He made a good stake for himself, changed his name and went straight. He's dead now—died about a year ago. But what I'm trying to say is that some of the stuff we got from his place may have been hot. You know, he may have swiped it himself in the old days. Poetic justice. Isn't that what they call it, Edgar?"

"They do."

"Good night, Edgar."

"Good night, Uncle."

For a while Edgar stood by the basement phone, thinking and planning. Tomorrow morning he would go to the public library to take one last look at the books there, hoping that he would find something that he had overlooked, something that would substantiate Gorevan as the place of origin. And tomorrow night he would take the rug away before his uncle's men arrived. The rug was his. Forever.

"A new Gorevan," said Henry Cartan to Edgar Henderson, "is not exactly a big deal. The weavers of these rugs are notorious for using dead wool."

"I've read about that," said Edgar. "Instead of shearing wool from a live sheep they take it from a dead one that has been slaughtered for meat. Makes for a poor rug."

"Wears badly. In a couple of years it looks like hell. Also, in many cases the modern Gorevan rug is treated with inferior Swiss dyes. But this particular Gorevan rug, you say, isn't new?"

"No, it's antique."

"Really?" Henry said. "You don't often hear of one of those. You say someone in your family is a collector?"

"Yes—my uncle. But actually I'm just guessing it's a Gorevan."

"Guessing? What does your uncle say?"

"He—ah—well, he d o e s n ' t know."

"A collector and he doesn't know?" Edgar mused to himself. Puffing on his cigarette he watched the crowds pass by on Randolph Street sidewalk outside the library. Up to now he had felt tired, what with last night and Mrs. Warburton's maid Sally, who had accepted his invitation for drinks at a Rush Street bar, then dinner at a restaurant nearby, then back to his apartment where she had stayed until sunrise. Though

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Sally had barely made it back to The Gold Coast Towers in time for Mrs. W's morning orange juice, the girl had given Henry the needed information. She had described her "favorite rug" and the details had brought him to the Decorative Arts room of the public library.

This room had its usual visitors —art students, would-be interior decorators, and the more artistic bums. After taking several books from the shelf he found himself sharing a table with a young man who appeared to be a student, at least judging from his hair and clothes. He was poring over books on Oriental Rugs, and after a while he noticed that Henry's books were on the same subject.

They had started talking to each other. This drew the inevitable frowns from people at adjoining tables, so they went out to the vestibule to have a cigarette. Here they introduced themselves, and when the student mentioned that he was interested in a particular Gorevan rug, Henry no longer felt tired.

"Actually my uncle really isn't a collector," Edgar explained. "He inherited some rugs recently and I'm trying to identify some of them."

"I see," Henry said, and then noticing that the other seemed uneasy about the subject of his uncle, he decided to change the subject. "Look, give me your address and I'll send it along to the Hajji Baba Society. You might like to go to their next meeting. You can learn a lot from the Oriental Rug experts who belong."

Edgar said that he was soon to move, but that he could be reached through the Student Union at the University. Henry was certain this was a lie, though he accepted it without comment or change of expression. On their way back to the Reference Room he put a hand on Edgar's shoulder, very friendly-like, saying casually, "Tell me more about the antique Gorevan."

"Well," said Edgar, "it's silk and mostly greens . . ."

After pretending only nominal interest, Henry returned to his books, his heart beating wildly. Edgar and Sally had described the indentical elements: silk, green, the center medallion, the Herati design, the swastika and the cypress trees, the turtle design and the blue border. Even before he had reached the library, Henry had placed the rug from the Tabriz district, and the town of Gorevan had crossed his mind.

Only an imbecile could overlook the inevitable conclusion. Edgar's uncle had "inherited" the rug from The Gold Coast Towers caper. Soon Edgar got up from the table, and Henry gave him a pleasant smile. Astonished by this incredible

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piece of luck, Henry followed the student out of the building.

Back at the house on Prairie Avenue, Edgar made plans. After dinner he would take the rug downstairs to his car in the garage. The Green Gorevan was heavy and it would be hard work, but he would allow enough time. Then off to a safe hiding place —a farm his late parents had owned outside of the city—and back before his uncle's men reached the house.

Carrying his dinner up to the ballroom, he thought about Henry Cartan, who seemed like an extremely nice guy. Edgar had fumbled a bit about his uncle being a collector, but he was sure he had not aroused any suspicion. And there had been no harm in talking about his rug. Considering how the burglary had worked out, it was as if the rug had never existed. He would like to join the Hajji Baba Society, he thought, as he walked into the ballroom.

Edgar sat at the card table, eating but not tasting the food before him. As usual he did not finish. He anwered the call of the rug. Tonight he stood just above the center medallion, facing the other end and the Arabic writing. Dim yellow light emanated from the sparkling chandelier. Black satin sheets covered the windows. And below him—that marvelous green expanse.

Again he asked himself: *Where am I?* And for once he felt he had the answer. He was in a temple, a house of worship, some sort of church. The rug was the altar. And outside—what was out there? A desert rimmed by bleak mountains? . . . He was hundreds of years away, in a far country.

Suddenly he felt the rug move, and then he did something that he had never done before. He knelt down on the rug and faced the courtyard—and the East . . .

It was with great difficulty that he finally cast off the rug's spell. As he did so, he looked at his watch, for he had been lost to this world—consumed by another world; but now he must return to Prairie Avenue and the vital business at hand.

Edgar rolled up the rug as tightly as he could, and little by little he inched it out of the ballroom. On the stairs going down, he stayed in front of it, moving it diagonally in slow spurts, quite aware that his obsession could crush him to death if it fell free.

He had nursed it to the second-floor landing and was starting down the final flight when a tinkling sound from below broke into his labors. It was the ringing of the basement telephone. And with the ringing came a terrifying thought. What if the men had come early and he would not have

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time to remove the rug?

Carefully he stopped its downward motion. Then he managed to wedge part of one side between two banisters. It seemed to hold. He backed away. It did hold. Taking the flashlight out of his pocket he rushed for the phone.

"Hello, Edgar," said Irim's lightly accented voice. "I have translated the Arabic on your rug."

Relief flooded over him. "What does it say, Irim?"

"First there is a date—the year 946"

"That's impossible. There isn't a rug in the world that old."

"You must remember, Edgar, that the Mohammedans reckon their calendar from Mohammed's flight from Mecca to Medina. That was in the year 622. By the Western calendar the date on the rug is 1540."

"My God! Sixteenth Century."

"Of course your rug must be a copy. A rug that old would be worth millions."

"Naturally, it's a copy," Edgar said hurriedly. "What else does the writing say?"

"From the Koran. Very famous. The statement is actually two separate ones found in the book, but they are often used together as a composite. *'Lā ilāha illa'llāh muhammadadun rasūlé llāh.'* "

"In English, please."

"There is but one God; Mohammed is the Apostle of God."

"I see."

"I think your rug may be the copy of a Prayer Rug."

"No, it's too big for a Prayer Rug."

"A Mosque Rug, then."

"Could be."

"What color is it, Edgar?"

"Primarily green."

"Then it is a Mosque Rug."

"How do you know?"

"Mohammed's flag—green was the color of the Prophet's flag. Know what this reminds me of, Edgar? A story told to me by my grandfather who came from Northern Iran, or Persia as they used to call my country—you know, a story handed down from legend. Well, it seemed that centuries ago a rug was stolen from the mosque there—a green rug. Anyway, the thief was soon killed—by the rug itself, it was said—and before the mosque could recover the holy rug it was stolen by another thief. He too was killed by the rug. Wherever it is now, no one seems to know, but the legend is that anyone who steals this rug will die."

"Where was this mosque?" Edgar asked, feeling his hand sticky-hot on the telephone.

"A small town a few kilometers from where my grandfather grew up—a town named Gorevan."

The night was cold and win-

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dy—there was not a breath of spring. The lake water's temperature, higher than that of the air above it, caused vapors to rise, and these the wind carried inland in patches where they collided with the meat-packer's palace like so many drunks.

Henry had left the engine on so that the heater would keep working, and with the day fading around him he had sat in his car across the street, looking at the awesome house. Turn of the century or before, no doubt, and modeled after one in Normady? Or Brittany, perhaps?

When darkness fell, Henry Cartan left the car, buttoning his overcoat tightly. The house was surrounded by a high iron fence. The courtyard gate was secured by a padlock. Henry, inserting his penknife blade into the lock, was answered by a rewarding snap. He shut the gate behind him and moved close to the house.

From the massive pile there came no sound louder than that made by the mists hitting its formidable heights. Almost complete silence. As for light, there was none except for faint glows behind some third-floor windows, though they were so subtle that Henry was not sure they were induced by electricity. A reflection from somewhere?

When the telephone rang, Henry jumped. The phone was apparently below street level, in the basement, and the noise had been muted. Still, he jumped. Then, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief, he listened to the phone ringing until it was either answered or the caller gave up. He leaned against the building, knowing that the student was inside, and waited for what he did not know—until the inhuman shriek drove him bolt-upright, away from the house, out into the courtyard.

The cry had been muffled by the thick walls, yet it had passed through them as if they were paper, so frantic and shocking had it been. And it had lasted one long breathful, rising in intensity near the end, making the silence that followed even more shocking.

Henry had never heard such a sound, but it was to his credit that he elected to meet the horror head-on. He moved to the side door. Then, putting an elbow through the glass, he opened the door from the inside. He lit matches, one after another, as he made his way to where death must have come. Whiskey, television sets, electrical appliances. . .so that's how it is, he thought vaguely. He would blow the whistle on this place; his career would profit. He moved on to the front hall.

Lighting a match, he caught a suggestion of the grand staircase, arching upward into darkness. At the foot of the stair-

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case there was a light pointing inward at the first step. It was a flashlight. Picking it up, his foot brushed against something. He turned the flashlight on what his foot had touched.

He saw a monstrous green mound, and sticking out from under it a head bent at a cruel angle. The mouth gaped as if continuing the protest. The eyes, which were open and bulging seemed to cry out—for what?

After surrrendering to a shudder Henry pulled Edgar's body out from under the rug. Using the flashlight he explored the rug's beauty. The ninth Warburton rug. The word magnificent was an understatement. A Gorevan, to be sure—a Green Gorevan.

He looked down at the dead student, then up at the grand staircase. The rug had killed Stanley Warburton and now this boy. What a freakish coincidence! But with the rug gone, there would be nothing to show that the boy's death was anything more than a fatal fall down the steep stairs. And knowing what he was about to do, Henry smiled faintly in spite of the circumstances.

The Green Gorevan, unreported in the burglary, had been Sally's favorite rug. It would be again. Before notifying the police about this house and its stolen merchandise, he would take the rug home. His bedroom was a large one, big enough for the rug to fit on a wall. Sally, he knew, had about her a whiff of larceny, among other things. He would hang it over the bed. She would like that. And he would, too.

Henry took The Green Gorevan back to his place. And so it hung over the bed. For a while.

NEXT MONTH . . .

detective SHORT NOVEL — complete!

REX STOUT's *Nero Wolfe Devises a Stratagem*

NEW short stories and novelets including —

HUGH PENTECOST's *Pierre Chambrun and the War for Peace*

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GERALD KERSH's *Karmesin the Fixer*

special reprint —

JOHN D. MacDONALD's *Dead on Christmas Street*

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3 *NEW* procedurals featuring

NICOLAS FREELING's Van der Valk

and

J. J. MARRIC's (John Creasey's) Gideon

and

LAWRENCE TREAT's Homicide Squad

Last month we gave you a detective doubleheader—two new police procedurals, one from the Netherlands (a Van der Valk incident by Nicolas Freeling), the other from England (a Gideon investigation by J. J. Marric-John Creasey). This month we give you a 'tec tripleheader—another new Van der Valk, another new Gideon, and for even more contrast, the newest American procedural by Lawrence Treat. To put it another way, here are three stories showing how the police operate in Amsterdam, in London, and in an unnamed big city of the United States . . .

In this second of the new series about Van der Valk, the Chief Inspector of the Youth and Morals Brigade deals with a most delicate problem . . .

VAN DER VALK AND THE YOUNG MAN

by NICOLAS FREELING

RARELY HAD CHIEF INSPECTOR Van der Valk seen so good-looking a girl. She had a regularity of feature that was cinematic, she would photograph well from any angle. She had splendid long legs, a tennis player's body capable of supple muscular movements, and a good carriage. Were it not for something vaguely Oriental about the modeling of her eyes and a

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certain fullness, or heaviness, in the lower face, she would be a raving beauty. Van der Valk, while all for raving beauties, found her even better-looking because of her individuality. Her maturity was remarkable too, mental as well as physical. It was hard to believe she was only sixteen.

Calm, very calm, almost too calm. She had walked unflustered and poised into the building and asked to see someone in authority because she had a complaint—an important complaint. She put a violin case down and sat on a chair, very upright. Plain green frock, cotton or linen, treated in some way to give a rough texture, like bark. A young tree.

"Chief Inspector Van der Valk. You wish your story kept in confidence? It can always be made official if we agree on that later. If you don't wish to pursue your complaint it will remain in confidence. Suppose you tell me your name, and your father's—does he know why you're here, by the way?"

No, he did not. Nobody knew anything about her being here. She was a student at the Conservatoire, the daughter of a Danish diplomat, and her complaint was an attempt on her of indecent assault. She seemed to have thought things out; she did not want publicity, she hoped she was a balanced, progressive human being, but she did not see why people should get away with things like that.

"Quite right, they shouldn't. Now the details... would you prefer to tell this story to a woman? Have you seen a doctor?"

No, and no. She lived out near Hilversum and had been offered a lift by a boy who lived nearby and whom she knew slightly. It was the familiar tale of an unpleasant young man who stopped in a little wood, such as those which shield the houses of the rich from the vulgar gaze of the road, who had proposed liberties and been repelled, who had tried wheedling and been snubbed, who had finally tried force and been —with some difficulty—fought off. She hadn't wanted to scream, because of neighbors, because of scandal, and when she had finally wanted to she had needed all her breath for breathing and fighting a silk scarf as well as hands.

"May I ask a technical queston?"

She knew what it would be—no, he hadn't. She was strong and active, she had fought hard and eventually got away. Nobody had seen her come home because her parents were at a party. She had told nobody, and had nothing to support her story but scratches and torn clothes. "I see. I will register your complaint. Thank you for the frank and lucid way you have spoken; that's help-

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ful. You are a good witness. Now we have to see what we can do. At the immediate moment, not very much, and I'll explain why. You know who this young man is, and that's a step already, but I can't arrest him. I have insufficient material evidence. Torn clothes and scratches and even a clear circumstantial story aren't enough—yet. Anybody see you get in the car?"

"Outside the Concertgebouw there were lots of people, but I doubt if anybody really noticed us."

"This is one of the most difficult charges to substantiate, without an eyewitness. I question him, he claims it wasn't so at all—worse, he claims you were willing—and where are we? I am sorry to appear crude but stains, internal damage, medical testimony—nothing else would satisfy a court. However, have you any brothers? Pity—brothers are useful. I can have an eye kept on this young man. What they do once they do again. Time-wasting, and unless we're lucky, inconclusive. But I do have a suggestion—the use of provocation to trap this person. It means staging a fairly elaborate scene. One can come into court with a tale of that kind, since the tribunal understands the evidential difficulties I've mentioned. But a very good defense can be constructed. You follow me?"

She kept silent, attentive.

"These types think they're irresistible, so that the trap is simple to operate. Really, though, I'd prefer the brothers' technique—do you know any male students?"

"A few, but—well, they aren't very athletic."

"Whereas he is? A pity. I shouldn't say so but summary justice is sometimes done that way. The difficulty with a trap is to find a suitable bait—a goat is needed, if you'll forgive me, whose bleating excites the billygoat. Would you be willing to do that if I were to guarantee your protection? Being both unethical and immoral it is not what I ought to be proposing and you've every right to be shocked."

"Yes, I would be willing."

"Very well. I must also tell you that you are not entirely free from blame. Getting into cars at night could be interpreted as willingness to accept the consequences. At best it's compromising. In short, not very sensible."

"But he wasn't a stranger. He lives just down the road. His father's an engineer—and a very nice man."

Van der Valk sighed. "Yes, I see. Well, what must be must be. Have you any girl friends your age whom you can trust to play a part in this? When the time

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is ripe I can provide a taxi driver whose daughter was once involved in an affair of this kind."

Van der Valk was no longer surprised that young girls should be such extremely good actresses, but he was wary of the fact. His reason for suggesting "a trap" was that it gave him opportunities of judging how much truth there was in the original tale. He had once known a girl construct a marvelously convincing tale of assault which, only by chance, he discovered to be false just before arresting a respected and blameless business man. An extremely improbable tale by the business man turned out to be the truth—it was the girl who had lied.

He didn't think this girl was lying, but he would have to make sure.

He felt surer a week later, when he had the young man before him. A night in a police cell is a humiliation, and decants a character. This young man was both cocky and offensive. "Just wait till my father gets his hands on you!"

"All in good time," said Van der Valk. Nineteen or twenty—yes, the music students might have been a bit too slim and pale. Strongly built, a swimmer, with curly hair and bulging muscles. That look of aggressive maleness that comes oozing through the pores of the skin. "Your story is—?"

"It's all bull. The slut's trying to frame me, pretending to be the injured innocent. All wails and tears and what will Mother say. Phony!"

"You're talking about a girl of sixteen," Van der Valk said, still placidly, "prepared to offer medical evidence of chastity."

"Pooh! The ones that act the little lady, they think they have to scream and struggle a bit, but they come round."

A little revolted, the policeman regarded the perfectly cool and assured young man for a little while in silence.

"You deny any violence?" he finally asked mildly.

"Ach, what violence? A bit of a kickup. They expect it."

"Speaking no doubt from your large and varied experience? Very well, we'll hear the witnesses. Number One, please . . . Ah. You're Mr. Marinus Hals, taxi driver, that right? Forty-four years old, married, self employed . . . Will you tell your story in your own words?"

Stocky, gray-skinned, immovable—a good witness.

"Well, I was plying my trade, in the Rembrandtplein, about ten forty-five at night—cinemas coming out. Young lady got into my cab and asked me to wait on the corner, explaining that she was worried about her friend and

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would I stand by, see that this other young lady got home all right. So I asked her could she pay me, how far it was, and so on, and I was satisfied. Why not?—I've been asked much queerer things. Cabby gets to see all sorts—and to know people.

"So I waited like she said, and this other young lady came out of the cinema with this young fella. They get into one of these little Triumph cars and I followed out towards Hilversum. He turned into a street with trees, and my young lady said wait here because I don't like this, and she explained that this fella had tried tricks before at the same place."

"That's a lie!" The accused interrupted indignantly.

"Quiet—you'll get your say. Go on, cabby."

"Well, it was a fine warm night but he put the top up. I could see him parked between some bushes like, and I know how these young squirts operate, so I go back to the young lady and say you're right, but stay quiet, and I got a flashlight and we stay there in the shadow."

"Stinking spy!"

"Quite. Go on—how long?"

"Might be ten minutes, and then there's a bit of a scuffle and I hear a voice saying, 'Let go of me,' so I run up and shine the flashlight and I mean it's obvious that she was trying to get out and he was holding her. Dazzled like by my light he lets go and she jumps out."

"Stop. Tell me exactly what you noticed about her appearance."

"Her hair was messed up and her dress was pulled open at the back. Untidy, a bit shaken, a bit out of breath as though from struggling, and she asks, 'Who are you,' and my young lady says she'd asked me to follow for sort of protection, and she says, 'I needed it.'"

"Continue."

"This young fella jumps out and uses foul language, calling me a peeping Tom and such, and adopts a menacing attitude. I'm used to that being a cab driver, so I jabs him in the stomach to stop him coming at me, and I give him a tap with the flashlight to keep him quiet."

"He coshed me." The accused pointed angrily to a pinkish graze on the forehead.

"Well, that's all. I said, 'Do you want to make a complaint, Miss?' and she says yes, so I hold his arm and tie his hands with some cord and I drive to the Hilversum bureau, and on what the two young ladies say and I can bear out they hold this young chap there for the night, and this morning your man come for me."

The accused began to protest vehemently.

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Van der Valk looked sternly at the young man. "Any further interrupting and I'll have you taken out. Your father is outside, and I'll see him when I reach a decision. All right, Mr. Hals. My assistant has taken your evidence down. He'll type it up and ask you to read it over before signing it—perhaps you'd not mind waiting outside? Number Two, please."

He had not seen Number Two before. A thin, pale, ratty girl, small for her age, with pale ratty hair covering her forehead. Insignificant. The intelligence and perseverance in her face came through only after some time. She gave her identity in a shy voice that gathered assurance slowly.

"About a week ago Martine spoke to me—I can't call her a close friend, so I was surprised. But she's always been kind to me. At the start I knew no one, I was scared and unsure of myself, and she helped me, and I was grateful. So I said I'd do anything I could."

"She suggested following her?"

"No, I did. I didn't know how—she thought of a taxi."

"She's a pretty girl—does she go round a lot with boys?"

"You plainly don't know her."

"I understand you feel loyalty. Is she sometimes provocative, teasing?"

"My God, how square you sound!"

"No doubt—but answer."

"Just ask anyone, is all. Any student, any professor."

"We will. Tell your story in your own words."

It was the same as the cab driver's, enlivened with feminine, slightly spiteful epithets.

"We know his type. Martine was insane not to see it but she's oddly innocent. D i p l o m a t ' s daughter—my father's a salesman. That one—smells of cheap aftershave and puts zinc ointment on his spots. Wears these Pierre Cardin clothes that his father, who must be an imbecile, gives him the money for. Never done a hand's turn in his nasty existence and no doubt never will. He'll say I'm jealous because I'm plain. Well, I'm a musician, or I hope to become one, and thanks, but I can do without your sweaty palms."

Van der Valk bowed politely and repeated the formula about signing statements.

"I should like now to hear the complainant . . . According to the statements given me, I understand that you accepted the company of this young man, although you previously had reason to complain about his behavior. Is that correct? Will you tell me why you again went out with him?"

"Well, two reasons really. I'd warned him off and I thought he'd got the message. When he met me again he behaved quite nicely and asked if I'd got to the cinema, and I didn't think

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it was quite fair just to refuse. I mean, he acted as though he were sorry for the first time. But I wasn't sure. So I told Anne, and she said I was mad, and I'd be in trouble, so I thought of a taxi driver who's driven me sometimes who seemed dependable, and well she was right, and it was lucky she insisted."

"Very well. I have the statement you made to the bureau in Hilversum and I don't think there's anything you have to add?"

"No."

Van der Valk turned formally to the young man.

"There's no longer any doubt in my mind. You tried to molest this young woman, and when she set a little trap, you fell into it, convinced that secretly she thought you an irresistible fellow. Hilversum recommends that you be charged with an offense and I agree. You are hereby indicted with assault on a female minor's person, and I commit you in custody for presentation to the Examining Magistrate. He will read you the statements of the witnesses, and give you every opportunity for explanation. I will notify your father of this decision.

"By the way—leave him a moment—I will add that you are the victim of your own desires and vanity. You have been caught by an old fable—I refer you to Jean de la Fontaine. Do you remember?—the dove saw an ant struggling in the water and pushed out a twig for it to climb on. A little later a lummox like you was out walking with his gun, saw the dove, and fancied it for supper. While aiming, the ant noticed him and bit him, and he missed. The moral, which you would do well to think over, is: 'No pigeon for a nickel;' and because you have a cheap mind, that holds everything cheap, however much money you have it is never more than a nickel. Lock him up; I hope he likes beans for dinner."

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a *NEW* Gideon by

J. J. MARRIC (John Creasey)

In this second of the Gideon series, never before published in the United States, the Commander of the C.I.D. (the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard) deals with a simple problem—a disturbance of the peace. And all three procedural stories (Nicolas Freeling's, Marric-Creasey's, and Lawrence Treat's) have that priceless ingredient of detective fiction—human interest . . .

GIDEON AND THE DRUNKEN SAILOR

by J. J. MARRIC (John Creasey)

CHANCE FIRST BROUGHT THE drunken sailor into Gideon's ken; not a great chance, it is true, for Commander Gideon of the C.I.D. was in the police court to watch the proceedings against a society embezzler when the sailor was charged with being drunk and disorderly. He was in his early twenties, tall, handsome, light-haired.

A policeman gave evidence that the accused, Samuel Daniel, had drawn a huge crowd to Piccadilly Circus by threatening to fight the world.

"And his breath was redolent of strong liquor, sir."

The magistrate, a wise man twice Samuel Daniel's age, asked, "Were you drunk?"

"Yes sir."

"Did you threaten to fight everyone?"

"If the policeman says so, sir."

"He has said so. Is anything known?" the magistrate asked the clerk.

"No, sir."

"What made you drink yourself silly?" inquired the magistrate.

"I had one too many, I suppose, sir."

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The magistate knew willful obstructiveness when he heard it.

"Very well. As it's a first offense I shall fine you only one pound. If you get drunk and make a nuisance of yourself again, you won't get off so lightly."

The sailor said, "No, sir. Thank you, sir. Who do I pay, sir?"

"The officials below will tell you."

The magistrate waved Samuel Daniel away. Gideon prepared to listen to the embezzler's lawyer try to get the charge dismissed. Instead, the police obtained an eight-day remand in the custody of a very frightened earl.

A week later, a small paragraph on the front page of Gideon's favorite evening paper was headed:

What to Do With a Drunken Sailor

Samuel Daniel was fined £10 or one week's imprisonment for being drunk and disorderly in Leicester Square last night. "I know what to do with a drunken sailor," said Mr. Llewellyn, the magistrate at Savile Street.

The name "Samuel Daniel" had stuck in Gideon's memory. So had his recollection of the handsome sailor who had been so politely obstructive when answering the magistrate.

Gideon was at the court later that day and had a word with Parden, the sergeant-in-charge below the dock.

"Did Samuel Daniel have anything to say for himself?" Gideon inquired.

"Funny you should ask that," said Sergeant Parden. "He stood straight as a ramrod and said, 'Yes, sir,' 'no, sir,' and 'sorry, sir.'"

"Just like the first time?"

"Yes."

"How old is he?"

"Twenty-two."

"Family background?"

"I'm not the Probation Officer. Dunno, sir. I do know he was going to sail today from London Docks. Cargo boat to East African ports. He won't give us any trouble for a few months."

But on that very night Samuel Daniel came roaring out of a public house in Soho and charged into a group of teen-agers whose only purpose was to gape goggle-eyed at striptease artists. One of the teen-agers was big for his 18 years and quite a boy with his fists.

"What do you think you're doing?" he demanded angrily.

"I'll show you." Samuel Daniel said.

He started to. The other teen-agers joined in. A shrill whistle brought two policemen on the double and they pulled the determined teen-agers off the struggling sailor. Samuel Daniel, with blood

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streaming from a cut lip and his right eye closed, clenched both fists and smacked them into the helpful policeman's face and stomach. It took four policemen to overpower him and hoist him into the Black Maria sent in haste from the nearest police station.

Gideon, at his desk next morning, was studying the reports of crimes committed and arrests made during the night. A "drunk and disorderly" would not reach him, but "assaulting a police officer in the course of his duty" did.

"Samuel Daniel," he read. After reflection he phoned Sergeant Parden and asked him to have a word with the Probation Officer likely to be on duty at court the next morning.

Samuel Daniel stood tall and upright in the dock, but was much the worse for wear. Mr Llewellyn looked at him without favor. After the policemen had given evidence —one of them lisping out of a gap in his teeth and his lips swollen to twice their normal size—the magistrate said, "This is the third time you've been before me. Obviously leniency means nothing to you. A term of imprisonment might. Before I pass sentence have you anything to say?"

"No, sir."

"Why did you go berserk last night?"

"I had one too many, I suppose, sir."

"Listen to me," said Mr. Llewellyn, leaning forward with magisterial authority. "It is one thing to have an occasional spree. It is another to get drunk day after day, and to use your considerable physical strength to beat down anyone who gets in your way. I shall sentence you to—"

"Excuse me, sir," ventured a small pale man from the well of the court. "May I ask for an opportunity to talk to the prisoner before sentence is passed?"

Mr. Llewellyn always obliged Probation Officers. This one, named Bush, was a friend of Gideon from many years ago.

"I don't want anyone interceding for me," said Samuel Daniel. "I did it. I'll pay for it."

"You may get six months in prison."

"So what?"

"Do you know what prison's like?"

"It can't be worse than a stinking cargo boat."

"Don't you like the merchant navy?"

"*Like* it? If I never see the sea again it will be too soon."

The Probation Officer, a patient man, arranged for sentence to be postponed for a week, while he made inquiries. One week later he tried again.

"I've got a note here about a talk I had with your old headmaster," he said to Samuel Daniel.

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"What right have you got to go behind my back to him?"

"As a Probation Officer, every right."

"You keep your big nose out of my affairs!"

Gideon, massive and formidable, was in a corner of the big room where this conversation was taking place. He stood up and approached Samuel Daniel.

"You've got a stinker here," he remarked to the Probation Officer. "Six months inside might do him good. But let him have it straight, Jim. Make him see that when he starts disturbing the peace, interfering with people who are behaving themselves, and attacking policemen, he put his big nose, his big feet, and his big fists right into *our* affairs.

"You keep quiet while I'm talking," he roared as Samuel Daniel tried to interrupt. "No one wanted you to put on any act. You did it yourself. What did his headmaster say, Jim?"

Samuel Daniel looked as if he would like to deal with Gideon as he had with the policeman—if Gideon hadn't been so big.

"I know what the old fool said," growled Samuel Daniel. "That I wanted to be a sailor ever since he knew me. Okay, so I did. Well, I changed my mind. Any law against that?"

"He said something else," Jim Bush put in. "So do the other men on his ship."

"And they say?" asked Gideon.

"That Samuel Daniel never touched alcohol."

"Used not to!" muttered Samuel Daniel.

"Listen to me," said Jim Bush. "I've seen the owners of your ship and they're prepared to overlook these lapses—if you'll behave in future. And I think I can persuade Mr. Llewellyn to give you another chance."

"I don't want another chance!"

"Better give him up, Jim," Gideon said, turning away. "Unless you can make him tell you why he pretended to be drunk when he wasn't."

"Pretended!" gasped Jim.

Gideon swung round on Samuel Daniel.

"Well? Why did you fake drunkenness?"

"How—how did you know—" Samuel Daniel began, and then tried to get out of the trap. "I was drunk! I'm not used to hard liquor, so a little knocks me over quick."

"A drunk always has a hangover," Gideon retorted. "It shows in his eyes and his bearing. It didn't show in yours. You may have had a drink or two, or you may have rinsed your mouth in whiskey so as to stink like a drunk. Now let's have the truth: why do you want to get yourself a reputation as a drunken sailor? And don't tell me you hate the world."

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Samuel Daniel closed his eyes. His voice was strangely subdued and humble.

"I want a little ship of my own," he said. "But if I break my contract with my employers they'll make sure I can't get one. They've got me tied up so tight that I can't wriggle out. But they have a clause in their contracts that if any of their employees ever gets a prison sentence he's automatically fired. So—so I *want* to go to prison."

Mr. Llewellyn sent him to prison for only two weeks. His company dismissed him.

"He got his little tramp, and he's happy as a drunken sailor," Bush told Gideon a few weeks later. "Good thing for him you were in court that first day, George. No one else realized that he didn't have a hangover."

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the *NEWEST* police procedural by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Well, it was like this: the old snapshot of Amy's father had disappeared. Mitch Taylor, an Inspector on the Homicide Squad, couldn't remember what happened to it. And then one day, as he was cruising around in car Number Four, taking it easy, it all came back to him—just what happened to the old snapshot. So he had to do something about it—which pulled Mitch into an unexpected mystery and by the end of it Mitch had come up with just about the slickest piece of detective work in a month of Mondays . . .

T AS IN TRESPASS

by LAWRENCE TREAT

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE DAYS when even a cop has no business complaining, and Inspector Mitch Taylor lazed along at the wheel of his squad car, south on Lincoln. He had Number Four, same as usual, and he stayed over in the right-hand lane, going slow and knowing in his bones that things couldn't keep up like this.

Not for him, anyhow. Because first of all the weather was too good for this time of year. Then there was nothing important doing at the Homicide Squad, so the Lieutenant had let the men go with no particular instructions. Like Mitch, they were on their own. Which meant maybe getting in touch with your stoolies and seeing what was what, and picking up some new connections if you were lucky. Because you were as good as the information you got, and you had to work on it every chance they gave you.

But things were all right, considering, and Mitch drove along nice and easy. And the way it sometimes happens when you're not thinking of anything in particular, you get an idea or you remember something you've been wanting to and couldn't. Anyhow,

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that was what happened to Mitch, because he kind of saw the whole scene all over again. And it did a lot more than come back to him: he saw what he hadn't even really noticed at the time, and what do you know about that?

What it was all about was this picture that Amy had of her father, which her sister in New York had sent to Amy last fall. Somebody had taken it around the time he got married, and it was just a snapshot like you get from one of those old-fashioned cameras. But the glaze on it was cracked at the edges and a little faded in spots and it was too small in the first place; so Amy wanted it restored and enlarged. Mitch said he knew the boys down at the photograph gallery; maybe they could do it for him whenever they had a little time on their hands, so why pay out good money?

Then the picture disappeared. Mitch couldn't remember taking it and Amy couldn't remember giving it to him, except it was gone. They both felt Mitch had it somewhere and that it would turn up some day, and they let it go at that.

Even now Mitch wasn't sure how he got hold of it, which didn't particularly matter anyhow. The point was that all of a sudden he remembered clear as could be, and what he remembered was dropping it in the old Nordlinger mansion. Which was a good two months ago, and something nobody around the Homicide Squad liked to think about.

The Nordlinger place was as far out and as isolated as you could get—another fifty feet and it would be over the city line and into the next county, and the Sheriff would have had to worry about it. There had been a few stories in the paper how the old mansion was falling apart and was a public nuisance, and after a lot of fussing around, the city had finally condemned it as unsafe. Only nobody was willing to admit they owned it, because it was going to cost a lot of dough to tear it down, plus shelling out a whole wad for back taxes. So the lawyers were fighting over how not to own it, and then somebody tipped off the police that kids were sneaking out there and having themselves a time.

Normally, stuff like that didn't concern Homicide—they handled crimes of violence, and if some kids wanted to smoke pot or study anatomy in the dark, that was up to the local precinct, which was the Twelfth. Or maybe, like Amy would say, it was up to the parents. But the thing was, if you went out there and made arrests, you were going to wind up with your day off spent in court, and some expensive lawyer throwing all kinds of fool questions at you.

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How the Commissioner got the Lieutenant to send Homicide out on the raid Mitch never knew. But the Commissioner must have used some pretty strong leverage, because one morning at the regular session the Lieutenant sprang it on them—how they had to go out to the Nordlinger place.

He didn't mention pot, but he had a diagram of the house and he'd figured out the best way to cover all the exits, and it came off exactly like he said it would. They and some men from the Twelfth sneaked up in the dark, and on signal they rushed in. All the doors were covered, and they hauled in about twenty kids. A few of them were just chippies, but the best families in town had a pretty fair representation, too.

Mitch felt like a heel, but most of the kids didn't really mind; they kind of laughed it off like it was a party. One kid kept yelling that this was a "happening" and they ought to get some fun out of it. But there was this thin wiry female adolescent; she was around thirteen years old and had needle-blue eyes in a too-smart face, and later on it turned out she was the Commissioner's niece and a born trouble-maker, which was maybe why the raid had been set up in the first place.

Mitch had nothing against her; she was just one of the crowd, until she took a swing at him and let out a stream of profanity that he hadn't heard from a female except in the tank back in New York, after they'd pulled in a bunch of drunken prostitutes. But this kid knew all the words and could put them together faster, and then she grabbed Mitch's hand and tried to bite it.

A little hellcat like that, you want to take her over your knee and spank her, which was just what Mitch threatened to do. Only instead of getting sore she went limp and looked up at him like she was going to faint unless he gave her a kind word, and she said, "Please, will you?"

Whatever he did next must have been the wrong thing, because she made a grab for his gun, and he slapped her hand and she began crying. Then Bankhart came over and asked Mitch if he needed any help, so Mitch shoved her at Bank and Bank laughed and said, "Take it easy, Mitch. And pick up your wallet."

That was all, except Mitch remembered now that something must have fallen out of his wallet when he picked it up. And what had fallen out was the picture of Amy's father. Maybe it was still there in the Nordlinger place and maybe it wasn't, but how could he tell unless he went there and looked? So Mitch swung off Lincoln and took the river road until he came to the old stone

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wall that fenced off the estate. There he slowed down and skirted the wall until he found the gate.

It was wrought iron and once upon a time had cost plenty; but now it was rusty and some of the fancywork was gone, and the hinges were pretty well shot. Somebody had left the gate open and there was room enough to drive through, which Mitch did.

The road was macadam and a couple of hundred yards long, but the macadam was all busted up and you had to drive careful and kind of work around the potholes. There were two rows of trees, one on each side of the road, and Amy could have told you what kind they were. The branches met at the top and made a sort of archway, and you couldn't see the house until you were practically up to it.

It was a big place, maybe thirty rooms or more, but most of the windows were smashed and the glass was in fragments. The paint was peeling, and on the long porch one of the pillars was at a crazy angle, so Mitch decided it was safer to go around to the side.

Like the rule book told you to, Mitch reported to the dispatcher to tell him where he was and that he was leaving the car, and then he stepped out and locked up. The sun was hot all right, and he loosened his tie and was going to take off his jacket, only he didn't. Instead, he stood there for a few seconds and wondered why anybody would build a house 'way out here, so far from anybody else. And whoever built it had spent plenty of the green stuff; you could still see where the flower gardens and the paths had been set out, and there was a stone statue of some Greek dame, one of those goddesses you saw in museums and they never had any clothes on.

Mitch wondered whether people had really gone around like that, and then he shrugged off the idea and went to the side where he remembered there was a door, and went in. It had been pretty dark at the time of the raid and there'd been a crowd moving around and getting in each other's way, so the room looked different now. You came into a big empty space with some fancy wallpaper that was falling apart, a couple of fireplaces, and the whole joint smelling clammy. There were some blankets still left around—the kids had been lying all over the floor when the police barged in on them, and there were a few wooden chairs and a kind of table made with planks stuck across a couple of wooden crates.

It hit Mitch how dumb this was—how really dumb! You drop a picture a couple of months ago and people are tramping all over the place and then you come back and expect to find it. Still, he

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was here, so he might as well take a look around, and about the only place worth bothering with, except the floor, was on one of the mantels, so he went over and looked. Nothing. Naturally.

Standing there, Mitch started thinking about Amy's old man. A sharp-faced, wiry guy who'd worked in a grocery store most of his life and died of a heart attack the first year Mitch and Amy had been married. Mitch remembered him with no particular feelings one way or the other. After all, what Mitch had been after was Amy.

The buzz of a mosquito made Mitch stop wondering about his father-in-law. The thing swooped down with a hum like a tiny jet and dive-bombed Mitch like it had something personal against him. He waited until it was almost ready to settle down for lunch and then he swatted it, real neat and before it even got to his wrist, which was where it was heading. Then Mitch looked at his wrist and saw the blood, which came from the dead mosquito, and that brought him up short.

Because in still air like this, mosquitoes don't travel. He'd read about that somewhere. They go maybe fifty or a hundred feet, not much more than that unless there's a breeze to take them, when they get carried maybe a mile or so. Only this mosquito was inside the house and there was no wind, not even outdoors.

Stuff like that, it gave you a kind of funny feeling, because it meant somebody was holed up here and you didn't know who or what. All you knew was, they must have heard you but were playing possum. It could be a couple of kids playing Jesse James, or it could be some thug had his hideout here and was all set to gun you down if you walked in on him. Still, whoever they were, they were here illegally, and Mitch had to rout them out.

He had a funny feeling, though. A deserted house like this, with scads of rooms and closets, and he had to go through every single one of them. Maybe somebody was watching him right now, maybe there was a gun on him—how could he tell? He had no excuse to ask for help, either. All he had to go on was a squashed mosquito, a little blood from it—and a strange kind of silence.

Mitch broke it sharply. "Hey!" he called out. "Anybody here?"

Even the echo sounded dangerous. So Mitch cleared his throat to sort of advertise that he wasn't going to sneak up on anybody and then he banged his feet down hard as he started up the stairs. Whoever they were, he was going to give them plenty of time to vamoose. But all the same, he had to go through this joint room by room.

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The third doorway he poked his nose in, he found the guy. Just a bum, lying on an old blanket, with his feet crossed and a cigarette in his mouth. Doing nothing. Needing a shave. And looking like he didn't have much use for Mitch.

Mitch stared down at him. "What are you doing here?"

The guy stared right back. "Who wants to know?"

Mitch crossed the room, took out his identification card, and held it out. "Me. Police. I want to know."

"I'm resting from my labors."

"Been here long?"

The guy shrugged, and Mitch decided on a friendly approach. "You were probably all over the joint," he said. "Happen to come across a snapshot of a guy standing in front of a house?"

"What do you want it for?"

"My wife's old man," Mitch said. "I lost it in here, and it's the only picture of him we got."

The way Mitch put it, the guy would realize that Mitch wasn't going to make something out of this, that there was nothing for him to worry about; so the guy came out of his huddle, so to speak. He climbed to his feet, went over to a packing carton where he had a few newspapers and a tin can with some peanuts in it, and he pulled the photograph out from between the papers. "This it?" he said. "I found it downstairs and kept it. For luck, sort of."

Mitch looked at it. "Yeah," he said. He opened his wallet and stuck the picture between a couple of one-dollar bills. "Thanks," he said. "Now let's go."

"What for? I just done you a favor."

"I'm doing *you* a favor. I'm not pulling you in for trespass. Or vagrancy or anything else."

The guy thought it over and accepted the situation. As far as Mitch was concerned, he had no intention of pulling in some bum on a minor charge. Still, he had to chase the guy away, even though he'd probably come back in a couple of hours. Because this kind of shelter—well, bums don't run into it every day.

Except that the guy was a little too willing to go along. There was nothing Mitch could put his finger on, still he was pretty sure something wasn't on the up and up.

There was a closet in the room, but Mitch didn't open it. Maybe he should have. On the other hand, maybe the closet was empty all the time. Mitch never did find out. What went through his head was, this guy was anxious to leave, only Mitch couldn't figure out why. And didn't particularly want to, either, on account of he had no reason to make work for himself. He told himself he'd call the Twelfth later on and wise

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them up that he'd found a bum hanging out at the Nordlinger place and they'd better check it out. That way, if anything happened, Mitch would look good and they wouldn't.

Anyhow, he shoved the guy ahead of him and ordered him to walk downstairs and then outside. There Mitch went over to the car and unlocked it.

"I'll take you out on Route Eight," he said. "I got a little business there, and I'll leave you where you can get a lift. You want to go south, don't you?"

"You're the boss," the guy said.

The ride was routine. Mitch reported back to the dispatcher, who had no instructions, so Mitch started the car and drove out. He noticed a couple of side roads inside the Nordlinger estate. He supposed they went to garages or tennis courts or maybe a swimming pool, but other roads were no concern of Mitch's. He went out the same way he had come in, along a stretch of the river road and then on Lincoln and then over to Route Eight. He drove as far as the pizza place, where he pulled up.

"A lot of trucks stop here," he said. "If anybody's going to pick up a bum like you, this is the place."

"I ain't got the price of a taxi," the guy said. "You want to lend it to me?"

"Beat it," Mitch said.

He went through the routine of reporting in and locking the car, and then went into the pizza place. Domingo, who was Spanish but had the knack of making the best pizzas in town, said hello and said Sam had left word to call him up.

Mitch nodded. "Sure. I got some calls to make, anyhow. You want to make me a couple of wedges while I use the phone?"

"Sure. Booth over in the corner."

"Naah!" Mitch said. "I need a private line. You got a phone in back?"

Domingo laughed. "You don't want to pay, huh? You don't want to pay for the pizzas, either. You never pay, no?"

Mitch grinned. "Sure. I'm a smart guy."

He walked around the counter, and Domingo pointed to a rear door that led into a small sitting-room-office. There Mitch phoned Amy and told her about the snapshot. He talked to her about five minutes, and her voice, cool and kind of lilting, made him feel good. Then he called Sam.

You didn't get to speak to Sam right off. Never. You left a message for him, and later on he called back. In a way Mitch supposed Sam was one of his stoolies, except that he'd never given Mitch any information and maybe never would. He delivered liquor off-hours, when it was

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illegal to sell it, and he owned a motorcycle with a sidecar in which he chugged around on his errands. Mitch could have pulled him in any time, but instead he let Sam operate, and maybe some day Sam would come up with something big. So maybe he was one of Mitch's stoolies, after all.

Once he'd given the message, Mitch put the phone down, came back to the counter, and ate his pizza wedges while he kidded around with Domingo.

"The man you come with," Domingo said. "You arrest him?"

"Naah. Just wanted to get rid of him. Why?"

"As soon as you go back, he cross the road to the other side. After a little while he find a truck to give him a ride."

Mitch munched his pizza. "I wonder what he did that for. I told him to go south, so he goes north."

Domingo shrugged, and then the phone rang and it was for Mitch. As he expected, Sam was at the other end of the wire.

"Hey, look," Sam said. He had a cheery little voice, like he was always performing on a stage and had to make everybody happy. "Hey, look. I know something good."

"Spill it," Mitch said.

"Maybe I do you a big favor. Mister, you remember the Koerner robbery?"

"Do I!" Mitch said. How could he forget that one? It was one of the biggest jewel robberies in the history of the city, chiefly because at that particular time the Koerner store had in its possession a necklace that some Italian had made 'way back around five hundred years ago, and it was one of the best known pieces of jewelry in the world. The guy that made it, he was famous only Mitch couldn't pronounce his name.

Anyhow, it didn't take the police long to find out that Dilly-Boy Hutton had pulled the job, with a couple of accomplices to help him out, and three days after the heist they caught Dilly-Boy over in Missouri. But they never did find out who his accomplices were. And as for the loot, he had none of it on him, he wouldn't talk about it or make a deal for it, and his regular fences didn't have a single piece that tallied with anything reported as missing.

That had the police guessing for a while, until somebody came up with the idea that this necklace was the real reason for the job, because some collector was going to pay more or less full value for it, instead of Dilly-Boy selling it to a fence where they'd give him ten percent or so and then break it up. And the collector they thought was the buyer was Hans Fursten and he lived in St. Louis, so it all added up. Dilly-Boy had elected to serve his time,

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which he'd done, and one of these days he'd go through with the deal.

That was the background, so when Sam asked if Mitch remembered the Koerner robbery, he said, "Do I!" And waited.

"Dilly-Boy's out of jail," Sam said cheerfully.

"You're telling me?" Mitch said. A thing like that, it had come over the teletype a few days ago and was no news to Mitch. He'd seen a picture of Dilly-Boy, too, like maybe a few thousand other cops had.

"He busted parole," Sam said, still trying.

"So?" Mitch said. If Sam was right, Mitch would find the news posted on the bulletin board when he got back.

"And he's hiding somewhere in town," Sam said, like he was sure Mitch could field that one.

He couldn't, but his voice didn't show any particular interest when he said, "Where?"

"How do I know? Somewheres."

"Look," Mitch said, "if you don't want me to haul you in, you better tell me where."

The squeaky little voice sounded frightened now. "Honest—I don't know!"

Mitch hung up. If Sam was handing it out straight, Mitch maybe had something valuable. And the more Mitch thought of it, the more it hit him that maybe Sam had brought Dilly-Boy some liquor in his hideout, in which case Sam was holding out plenty. And from what Mitch knew of Dilly-Boy—blond, smooth dresser, and with a fondness for flashy dames—he'd be wanting liquor and he'd be getting it through some little punk like Sam. Still, how could Mitch be sure?

A little later on, with his belly full of pizza and nothing special to do, Mitch wondered why that bum of his had gone back to town instead of south and away. And whether maybe he'd holed up in the Nordlinger mansion again. And if so, why.

Because the air was still balmy and Mitch figured he might as well have another look, he went back. The place seemed pretty much like before, broken down and deserted. He drove on up to the house, where he had a surprise: another car was there.

He didn't report in, not yet, on account of he didn't want anybody to know he was here. And when you call the dispatcher and he buzzes back and tells you in that loud crackling voice of his that everything's okay, you might as well blow a whistle and yell out that you're a cop and you want everybody to know it.

What Mitch did was, he braked and turned off the motor so he could listen. For maybe ten seconds he didn't hear anything, except a couple of birds that were

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all excited about something. Then there was a sharp yell from behind the house and then three fast shots and quick footsteps and some more noise. Mitch pulled out his gun and had it ready.

Next thing was, this bozo came stumbling out from around the porch. He was tall and blond and he had a hat over his face, and he staggered along like a pack of dogs was chasing him. He had an automatic in his hand, and when he saw Mitch he fired and kept right on coming, like he was leading an old-fashioned cavalry charge, which he sure as hell wasn't.

You could see that the guy was hardly even aiming, so naturally the shot went wild. What it came down to was, the guy had a gun and he had to shoot it off and he didn't care at who or why. As far as Mitch was concerned, the question was whether to try and drop the guy or to tell him he was a cop and hope that wouldn't get him sore and improve his aim. About the only thing Mitch was sure of was, he liked the protection of the car and was going to stay put.

Then two things happened. Mitch heard a car start up and saw it come tearing from behind the house. It was a big high-powered job and was going fast by the time it came into sight. The second thing was, this car started charging straight at this guy with the gun, but suddenly it swerved, maybe because the driver saw Mitch and decided Mitch was the Number One problem. Because the guy driving it was the bum Mitch had found in the house.

Mitch fired, twice. His first shot was up in the air, to warn that he meant business, and the second shot was at the windshield of the car. Of course Mitch missed. All that target practise down at the range was okay and Mitch was a pretty fair shot, but you fire at a car speeding like this and what can you expect? A big fat zero.

Still, Mitch got a good look at the car, although he had no intention of chasing it. Because he had plenty to do right here. There was this guy with the gun, he'd tripped or something and was laid out flat. Maybe the car had nicked him or maybe he'd passed out for some other reason, but in any case he was no threat for the next minute or so. Then there were those shots to investigate, and you could be plenty sure that things had been happening behind the house.

But before Mitch could find out about that, he had to get in touch with the dispatcher, so Mitch pressed the radio-phone button and waited.

"Taylor, Car Four," he said, as soon as he had contact. "There's been a shooting at the

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Nordlinger place. A man looking like a hobo and driving a black, recent-model Cadillac just escaped and left the premises, direction unknown. License plate starts with 2F. At least one other man is involved, and he is armed. Please send assistance. I'm going to investigate. Over."

The dispatcher answered. "Message received. Will send help. What conditions are to be expected and what do you advise?"

That was easy. "Tell 'em to get here as soon as they damn can, and to watch out they don't get shot. I'm in front of the house and I'll try and keep the lid on, but you never know. And better send an ambulance."

Mitch put the phone down and wiped the sweat off his forehead. He wasn't exactly nervous, but on the other hand maybe he was, and why not? Because he had to walk up to a guy who was lying on the ground about forty feet away, a guy who had a gun which he'd already fired at Mitch and was liable to do it again.

Mitch kept his revolver raised as he stepped out of the car. "I'm a cop," he said. "Let go of that gun of yours, or I'll shoot it loose."

The guy groaned, turned over to glance up at Mitch and then fainted away, but Mitch got a good look at the face. And from the pictures he'd seen, this was Dilly-Boy Hutton himself.

Mitch, moving like his kid did when he said there were fifty Indians hiding behind trees, sidled up to Dilly-Boy, kicked the automatic out of his hand, and picked it up. Dilly-Boy groaned again. Mitch decided he didn't want to walk around that house, not yet, not all alone, so he bent down and waited for Dilly-Boy to come to and open his eyes. When he did, Mitch started in with the questions.

"You're Dilly-Boy Hutton, aren't you?" he asked. The guy nodded. "Okay," Mitch said. "What happened?"

Dilly-Boy groaned. "Geez!" he said. "My leg!"

"I got an ambulance coming. Tell me what happened."

"He killed them both. He just mowed them down without warning. I ran, and he hit my leg. He killed them, just like that."

"Who did?"

"I don't know."

"Tell me about it," Mitch said, "and you'll feel a lot better. Now—who got shot?"

"The Lamport boys. Jules and Happy Lamport."

"They're the ones that helped you on the Koerner job, aren't they?" Dilly-Boy didn't answer either way, which told Mitch he was right, so he went on with his questions. "What were you doing here?"

"Nothing."

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"Look, Hutton, you got a slug in your leg and you broke parole and you're going back to jail, and when I let out how you shot at me, and I'm a cop, nobody's going to be nice. You feel good enough to think things out?"

Dilly-Boy's blue eyes stared up without expression.

"We know you hid the stuff from the Koerner holdup," Mitch went on, "and now we know where you hid it. Right here, in back of the house. Did you have time to dig it up?"

Dilly-Boy was thinking it over, like he couldn't guess how come the police knew so much. After he got over the shock he said in a whisper, "Yes."

From the distance Mitch heard the sound of a siren. So Dilly-Boy had dug up the jewels and been hijacked. By this bum who'd been waiting for him, here in the house. And who was no bum.

"Who took them?" Mitch asked. "Who shot you?"

"I don't know," Dilly-Boy said weakly.

"Who would know where the stuff was hidden?"

"I don't know. I was sick for a while in the prison hospital, I was delirious, I don't know what I said. And there were trusties who could have heard. I must have said I hid the stuff at the Nordlinger place, and word got out. Because somebody was waiting, but I don't know who."

Mitch stood up. He had it pretty straight now, and he wondered just how he could angle all this without looking too bad. Because here this bum who was no bum at all had fooled him completely. Or worse yet, Mitch had been leary of the guy and had done nothing. If Mitch had frisked him and found a gun, for instance, maybe this wouldn't have happened.

Except it probably would have. The guy was too cagey to get caught with a gun on him. He must have seen Mitch arrive, spotted him for a cop, then waited, hoping Mitch wouldn't find him, but all set in case Mitch did. And what had put Mitch onto him was this mosquito he'd swatted.

Mitch kind of smiled. The Lieutenant liked stuff like that, it showed you were using your bean, and it looked great in the papers. But the thing was, who was this disguised bum? Mitch had seen him and could identify him, but—who was he?

The sirens were closer now, and Mitch stepped back. He had a prisoner, there were a couple of dead or wounded behind the house, and Mitch had given a description of the car in which the killer was escaping. Not bad, when you looked at it the right way. Except you never could figure the Lieutenant and how that mind of his worked.

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Mitch could hear a car now; it came screaming down the driveway and screeched to a stop. It was a radio car and there was another one behind it, each manned by a pair of uniformed patrolmen. They jumped out, their guns drawn, and rushed up to Mitch.

He pointed to Dilly-Boy. "One of you stay with this guy. The rest of you—let's have a look behind the house. And watch yourselves."

They didn't have to. One of the Lamport boys was dead, the other one lay there moaning, near a small hole in the ground with a spade next to it. Even the uniformed cops could tell what had happened.

Stuff like that, it's all over the radio and headlined in the papers, but it's the sort of thing you hate, down at Homicide. Because you know there's a killer loose and that one of you may have to go up against him. You just hope he gets out of your jurisdiction and shoots it out with some other department.

You couldn't tell, though, whether this guy had gotten the hell out of city, county, and state, or whether he'd holed up nearby, because they found the abandoned Cadillac about three miles from the Nordlinger place, and that was where the trail ended. And the car, as usual, had been stolen in the first place.

What with all the excitement and the big brass hanging around the scene, Mitch didn't get to giving a private report to the Lieutenant until late that afternoon. Then, in Lieutenant Decker's little cubicle of an office, Mitch gave him a complete rundown, except the business about that picture of Amy's father, which was personal. Until all of a sudden Mitch realized that the snapshot was the most important thing of all!

He took out his wallet, slipped out the two bills, and lifted the upper one. He pointed to the photograph. "Still glossy," he said, "so it ought to have some good prints on it."

Two hours later, between Jub Freeman in the lab and the files of the identification bureau, they knew the name, hangouts, and whole history of the killer. Dan Thompson, stickup artist. So it was just a matter of time before they got him, which was only a couple of days later over in St. Louis.

In a way, what Mitch did was kind of a triumph, and in another way it wasn't. Because when he told the Lieutenant how that mosquito had practically told him somebody else was around, the Lieutenant gave him a funny sort of look.

"How," the Lieutenant said, "do you know it wasn't your own blood? Because I can see your

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wrist right now, and you got a bite from somewhere."

But worse than that, when Mitch came home, the first thing Amy did was ask for the snapshot that he'd told her about at noon, when he'd phoned her from the pizza place.

"I'm so glad you found it," she said, "and this time *I'm* going to have it fixed up and enlarged, even if it costs us something."

"Sure," Mitch said, thinking of how it was state's evidence and would be in the D.A.'s hands for a few months at least. "Only right now—well, the thing is—"

Amy stepped back, frowning. "Mitchell," she said, "don't tell me you've lost it again!"

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a NEW Nick Velvet story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

One month after the World Series we bring you the sixth in the series about Nick Velvet and his unusual and bizarre thefts—this time, the theft of an entire baseball team complete with manager, coaches, second-string players, bench warmers, pinch hitters, batboy, trainer, and publicity man.

You won't believe a word of it. On the other hand, with "willing suspension of disbelief," you'll enjoy every word of it . . .

THE THEFT OF THE MEAGER BEAVERS

by EDWARD D. HOCH

THE MAN WAS SLIM AND DARK and Latin, and his name was Jorge Asignar. He sat across the table from Nick Velvet, studying him through narrow, uncertain eyes.

"I understand that you steal things," he said, speaking with a pronounced accent.

"Some things," Nick admitted. "Unusual things." He'd been at home with Gloria, relaxing with a cold beer, when the call had come from Asignar. He disliked the man immediately, but personal feelings never entered into his professional activities. "What do you want stolen?"

Jorge Asignar smiled, showing a line of gold-capped teeth. "A baseball team."

"A baseball team?" In his business nothing ever surprised Nick Velvet. "Any special one?"

The Latin shrugged. "I leave the choice to you. Your fee, I believe, is $20,000?"

"That's correct, under ordinary circumstances. But for especially difficult or dangerous assignments I charge thirty thousand. With something this size I believe the

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larger fee would be justified."

Asignar waved an indifferent hand. "Agreeable. Half the money now and the balance on delivery."

"Fine."

"Then the choice of a team and all other arrangements are yours. It must be a major league professional team, and it must be delivered intact to my country within the next two weeks."

Nick glanced at the calendar in his wallet. Two weeks would give him till August 16th. "And what is your country?"

"The island Republic of Jabali. Not far beyond Cuba, in the Caribbean."

"I see," Nick said slowly. "And might I ask what the Republic of Jabali wants with an American baseball team?"

Asignar curled his lips in a sort of smile, showing again the gold-capped teeth. "Our president, General Tras, is a great baseball fan. In past years your teams occasionally played exhibition games in Jabali, but there have been none in several years. General Tras has personally trained and equipped a Jabali national team, but they have no one to play."

"Let me get this straight," Nick said. "You want me to steal an entire baseball team and transport it to Jabali just so your President can have competition for his private team?"

Asignar bristled a bit. "You are well paid to perform a service, Mr. Velvet. I had understood from some satisfied customers that you never questioned the peculiarity of an assignment."

"And I don't. But do you realize what this theft might do to relations between Jabali and the United States? There was a time when it would have brought a boatload of Marines to your shore. Even now you could hardly escape without denouncement in Congress and possibly some sort of economic sanctions."

"As soon as the team is in our hands we plan to issue a statement that the theft is merely temporary. We will return the team safely after one game with our Jabali team. We could hardly expect to hold the American players indefinitely."

"You're still in for a lot of trouble from Washington," Nick warned. But then, having said it, he accepted Asignar's half fee—in cash.

"What are you doing, Nick?" Gloria asked later that evening. They were sitting in the back-yard patio, after dinner, as he pondered the evening paper.

"Checking the baseball standings."

"I never knew you were interested, except at World Series time."

"I'll be away on another trip," he told her. "Just wanted to see what games I'll miss."

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Nick had already decided that the theft of the baseball team must not be allowed to interfere with the pennant races in the two leagues. But this early in August most of the teams were still in contention. He did some quick figuring and found that only one team was definitely out of it—the hapless Beavers. Though Nick followed the sport only occasionally he was—like nearly everyone else in the country—well aware of the Beavers' plight. They had replaced the old Brooklyn Dodgers and then the New York Mets as the butt of comedians' jokes, and after losing 14 straight games earlier in the season the sports sections had dubbed them the "Meager Beavers."

All right, Nick decided. Since the choice was his to make, it would be the Beavers. Perhaps with the Beavers to play against, General Tras might even be victorious with his own team, and that would certainly please him.

Next Nick checked the schedules of the Beavers at home and on the road for the next two weeks. They flew to New York for a week-end series with the Mets on Thursday. Then, on Monday, they flew on to Atlanta to play the Braves before returning home. Nick checked the standings again and confirmed that the Braves were also far down in the National League. A postponed or canceled game would not affect their standing, either.

Then that's what it would be—the Beavers on next Monday—a full week ahead of Asignar's deadline.

Pop Hastin had been manager of the Beavers for as long as anyone—even the sportswriters—could remember. He'd come up with the team from Triple-A baseball when the National League expanded, and it was only a high personal regard for Pop that had kept the Beavers from ridicule this long.

He was a gray, bristly man in his early sixties, and his reputation for eating umpires alive had got him thrown out of many ball games. The fans and the sportswriters loved it, of course, as they loved everything Pop did. They'd turned against his Meager Beavers only with the greatest reluctance.

"You're a writer?" Pop asked, eyeing Nick with open suspicion. They'd met in the dressing room at Shea Stadium, just after the Mets defeated the Beavers by a score of 9 to 1.

"That's right," Nick confirmed, passing over a card. "With *Sports Weekly*. We want to do an article on your team."

Pop Hastin grunted, rolling the plug of chewing tobacco to his other cheek. "More Meager Beaver stuff?"

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"Nothing like that. My editors want an in-depth article with a sympathetic slant, to balance some of the other stuff."

"How long will it take? We're flying to Atlanta in the morning."

Nick hesitated, then said, "I was going to suggest that I might fly down with you. That way we could talk at leisure and I'd get to meet some of your key players."

Hastin snorted. "This year the Beavers got no key players. We haven't gotten more than four runs in any game all summer."

"Still, there's Karowitz at first base—"

"Yeah, he's pretty good."

"And that rookie shortstop, Nesbitt."

"The kid, yeah." Pop Hastin shifted the tobacco again. "Well, I guess you could fly down with us. There's plenty of room these days. Not many of your sportswriters come along any more."

Nick Velvet smiled. "I'll meet you at the airport in the morning, then."

The chartered jet which flew the Beavers between cities on the National League circuit was piloted by a young man named Farnsworth. He stood by the ramp with a pretty, long legged stewardess welcoming the players aboard, smiling and joking with them about the previous day's game.

Nick Velvet, walking beside Pop Hastin, boarded the plane with a friendly nod toward the pilot and stewardess. It was a clear August morning, perfect for flying, and the players seemed in a good mood considering their recent losses. There were nineteen of them making the trip, plus Pop and the coaches. A publicity man—a slight harried individual named Roswell—was also along, as were the trainer, batboy, and a few others.

"Sometimes we have a planeload," Hastin explained, settling comfortably into his seat and strapping himself down. "But this isn't much of a trip and a few of the regulars aren't making it. We have a couple of injured players back home, and some of the front-office people stayed in New York for a league meeting."

Roswell, the publicity man, dropped into the seat across the aisle, eyeing Nick with open suspicion. It had not been an easy season for him. "What sort of an article did you say you were writing?" he asked.

Pop Hastin interrupted, trying to avoid trouble. "All the equipment on board, Ros?"

"Sure it is. That's not my job, anyway." He turned his attention back to Nick. "We've had a pretty bad press the last few months—all this Meager Beaver stuff. If you're going to write something like that, forget it."

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"No, nothing like that," Nick reassured them. "I'm planning something that will put the Beavers on the front pages of every paper in the country and make people forget you're in last place in the National League."

The jet had risen smoothly from the runway and was climbing into the clear blue sky. Pop Hastin relaxed. "We're on our way," he said. "Now just how do you propose to give us all this publicity? Through *Sports Weekly?*"

"Partly," Nick answered vaguely. "Suppose you introduce me to a few of the players."

They went forward in the plane and Pop spoke to the team's muscular first baseman. "Stan Karowitz, this is Mr. Nicholas, a writer with *Sports Weekly*. He's going to give us a good article."

Nick dropped into the seat next to Karowitz and started asking the Beavers' star some routine questions, taking notes as he talked. "Do you think the Beavers are coming out of their slump, Stan?"

"It's a little late in the year now," Karowitz replied, "but we think our rookies might make a strong foundation for next season."

Nick had been watching the stewardess walk past them to the cockpit and unlock the door with a key that dangled from her waist. She was carrying a tray with two steaming cups of coffee. "Pardon me," he interrupted Karowitz.

He moved quickly down the aisle behind the girl, catching the door before she could close it. The flight was still young, but he might not get another chance this good. He pushed past her, shoved the copilot aside, and pointed a pistol at the pilot's head.

Farnsworth, the pilot, turned as the stewardess gasped. He started to rise, then thought better of it. "Where to?" he asked in a resigned tone. "Havana?"

"No," Nick told him. "The island of Jabali."

"We may not have enough fuel for that."

Nick kept the pistol steady. "Well, let's give it a try anyway, shall we?"

Hours later, as the jet settled down on the runway at Jabali Airport, Nick Velvet breathed a sigh of relief. The fuel had indeed been low, and he wondered what he would have done if they'd run dry over the Caribbean. Or if the pilot and copilot had put up a fight. He'd never killed an innocent person during any of his assignments, and he wouldn't have started now. More likely he would have knocked them out and tried to bring the big plane in himself—though he'd never piloted anything larger than army transports during a brief period of the Korean war.

When he stepped out of the

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cockpit he faced Pop Hastin, the manager's face flushed with fury. "Why did you bring us here?" Hastin demanded.

"Calm down," Nick told him. "You're in no danger." He motioned with his gun for Pop and the players to leave the plane.

Roswell pushed his way through the crush. "You had no intention of writing any article! It was all a lie to hijack this plane!"

"It wasn't entirely a lie," Nick pointed out. "You'll get plenty of publicity out of this."

"Publicity?" Pop Hastin looked out the window at the welcome signs. "You mean somebody wanted to kidnap the Beavers?"

Nick Velvet smiled. "That's right. Welcome to Jabali."

The President of Jabali, General Tras, was waiting to greet them with his eight cabinet ministers. He was an imposing man in his full military uniform, smiling broadly yet giving an unmistakable picture of power. There were armed bodyguards on both sides of him, and his gloved fists were clenched with expectation.

"We had your radio message, Senor Velvet. You have truly fulfilled your mission! Let us proceed to the National Hall, where I can more formally greet my guests."

Jorge Asignar stepped forward, wearing the purple sash of a cabinet minister. "I have the balance of your money," he told Nick. "The President is very pleased."

"What are you? Secretary of Kidnaping?"

"Minister of Information," Asignar replied with a thin smile. Then, motioning toward the plane, he questioned, "Who are all these people?"

"Baseball teams aren't just nine men and a rack of bats. Not these days. They need a trainer, batboy, and press agent. They need pitching and batting coaches. They need—"

Stan Karowitz came barreling over, looking for a fight. "What is this, anyway? Are we prisoners here?"

Nick tried to calm him. "Their President likes baseball. You'll be home in a few days."

"A few *days!*"

But already the armed guards were moving in, steering everyone toward a big waiting bus. There was no opportunity for argument. Nick rode to the National Hall in the black limousine of General Tras, sitting in the back seat between the President and Asignar. On the front fenders fluttered the flag of Jabali—a field of red with a wild boar's head in the center, enclosed by a black triangle with three seashells along each of triangle's sides.

"Jabali," Nick observed. "The wild boar?"

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"At one time they overran our little island," General Tras remarked. "Now they are confined to the zoos and a few game preserves back in the hills."

Here and there along the highway were people to cheer and wave as the big presidential car went by. When the marble-faced auditorium came into view, the crowds grew thicker.

"This was really Jorge's idea," the President said, patting Asignar approvingly on the knee. "I had been training our own team for some years as a hobby, but it all meant nothing without real competition."

"I hope you're prepared to risk the wrath of my government," Nick commented dryly.

Tras dismissed it with a wave of his hand. "The Beavers will be safely returned after a single game with the Jabali team. No one will go to war over it."

The auditorium was about half full when they entered. Asignar motioned Nick to a seat on the side, saying, "General Tras and the cabinet ministers always sit in row J. You can follow the proceedings from here."

"Fine," Nick agreed. He'd been sitting only a few moments when a strikingly beautiful girl with long black hair slipped into place next to him.

"You're Nick Velvet?" she asked quietly.

Her English was perfect, which was his first surprise. And she knew his name. "That's right. And you are—?"

"Maria Tras."

"The President's—"

She laughed lightly at his hesitation. "Daughter."

"Are you a baseball fan too?" Up on the stage Asignar was beginning to speak. Nick's slight knowledge of Spanish indicated he was introducing the President.

"Not like my father," the girl was saying in answer to his question. "In fact, I was against this whole scheme. I was at Columbia for four years and I know how serious you Americans take your baseball."

"That's what I tried to tell Asignar."

"That man!" She made a face.

"What does your father want? Just a game?"

"That's all. It was wise of you to steal the Beavers. At least it'll be something of an even match."

General Tras mounted the stage and held up his hand for silence. Surprisingly, Pop Hastin was at his side. Tras spoke a few words in Spanish and then switched quickly to English. "I want now to welcome a fine and famous American baseball manager, the pride of the National League—our guest, Pop Hastin of the Beavers!"

Even Pop seemed taken aback by the applause with which the introduction was greeted. If he'd

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planned to denounce the kidnaping from the stage he must have had second thoughts. He cleared his throat, grinned weakly, and said, "I can't approve of being brought here against our will, but I am pleased at the reception we've received. We look forward to meeting the Jabali team on the field."

The audience cheered and General Tras smiled. Off to one side of the stage the shortstop Mike Nesbitt and some other players seemed far from pleased at the turn of events, but there was little they could do. General Tras resumed his speech. The big game would take place in two days' time, on Wednesday. The teams would have Tuesday for practice.

"I can't wait to see it," Maria Tras told Nick as they left the building.

"I'm surprised that Pop Hastin gave in so easily."

"Now that it's done, the game should be an exciting one." She glanced sideways at Nick. "Will you be staying for it?"

"I have no reason to. Asignar paid me the rest of my fee. But it might be wise to stay down here for a few days. Even though my true identity isn't known I'm sure the authorities back in the States will be watching for me."

"I wish you would stay."

"Thanks."

"And I hope you can dine with us at the presidential palace tonight. My father is inviting Pop Hastin and all the others."

"I don't know if I dare face him," Nick told her. But there was something odd about the whole business, something that bothered him. He knew he'd be there.

The presidential palace was as regal as Nick had expected—a great white building that must have dated from the early years of the century. In certain rooms there had been obvious attempts to copy the décor of the White House in Washington, but the venture had been ruined by a tasteless plushness more in keeping with kings than presidents.

"Our country was founded in 1899 by the great revolutionary leader Palidez," General Tras explained as he led them on a brief tour. "He wrote our constitution and built this house. *Nueve*—that was the word he lived by. This is called the *Casa Nueve*, a fitting name."

Nick nodded. "The New House," he translated, "for a new country."

Maria shot him an odd glance and started to say something, but then Asignar joined them with Pop Hastin and Roswell, the publicity man. "Shall we go in to dinner?" the Minister of Information suggested.

Roswell was seated next to

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Nick, and as they sat down the publicity man said, "We might make something out of this yet, no thanks to you."

"Oh?"

"Pop thinks it's a great publicity break for the team, and he's right, of course. Every magazine in the country will want our story when we get back."

Later, after a meal of wild boar more fitted to a medieval monarch than a Caribbean president, Nick had an opportunity for a private word with Pop Hastin. "I'm glad you realize the publicity value in all this," he said.

Pop reached for some chewing tobacco. "I was upset at first, but now I'm beginning to like the idea. All season long I've listened to sports commentators chuckle about the Meager Beavers, and at my age that wasn't easy to take. But now we've been kidnaped by you and brought down here to play the Jabali team. You didn't kidnap the Yankees or Cards or Pirates—you kidnaped the Beavers!"

"Well, yes," Nick admitted. He wasn't about to mention that he'd picked the Beavers simply because they were last in the league standing.

"Coming out to the practice tomorrow?" Pop asked.

"I'll be there."

By morning the news of the stolen Beavers had made headlines around the world. The storm was particularly heavy in Washington, as Nick had feared, but Pop's statement to the American Ambassador that they were well-treated and anxious to play the game had done much to cool the tense situation.

At the stadium for the practice session Pop Hastin had a further statement for reporters. "We are here as guests of the President and we consider it an honor to be so chosen. We'll be returning home after the exhibition game tomorrow." In answer to persistent questions he added, "We are not being held against our wills or mistreated in any way."

Nick breathed a sigh of relief as he settled onto a bench to watch the practice. At least Pop's statement should take some of the pressure off him. He glanced up to see Tras and his daughter coming over to join him. The President was obviously excited, like a small boy on a Sunday afternoon at Yankee Stadium. The General watched intently as Stan Karowitz took batting practice and actually cheered when the tall first baseman hit a line drive to the farthest corner of left field.

"Do you think your team can take them?" Nick asked.

"The Beavers are very good. It will be a real event for my people and I do not really care which team is victorious. But of

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course I will be cheering for Jabali." He watched the pitchers for a time and then added, "Jorge has suggested a patriotic pageant before the game tomorrow. Our independence day is in a few weeks—on September 9th—and he thinks an early celebration is in order. He's to speak to both teams about taking part."

Nick grunted and lit a cigarette. A few minutes later, when General Tras went down on the field to speak with his own brightly uniformed team, Maria moved next to Nick. "Something's troubling you," she observed.

"I'm running low on American cigarettes."

"Something besides that. I've known you only a day, but I can see the worried look in your eyes."

"It's just this whole setup," he admitted. "I could understand one man, an absolute ruler, getting the crazy idea to steal a baseball team and bring it here, overriding the objections of his advisers. But this is different. Your father told me it was Asignar's idea. And yet Asignar apparently isn't even a baseball fan. At least he's nowhere in sight today."

"You worry needlessly," she assured him. "After all, the Beavers are happy with their new fame. My father is happy. You should be happy with the money you were paid. Why look for trouble?"

"Because I brought them here. If anything happens, I'll feel responsible."

That night Nick dined with Maria at Jabali's most expensive restaurant. On the way home he noticed an anti-Tras slogan chalked in Spanish on the side of a building. Maria seemed to miss seeing it, and he did not call it to her attention.

Nick had arranged to escort Maria to the baseball game the following day, since her father would be busy on the field during the opening ceremonies of the pageant. When he called for her at the presidential palace just after noon, he still carried the pistol he'd used to hijack the plane. He wondered why he hadn't left it in his room, yet knew somehow that it belonged with him, even at a baseball game.

"There's already a lot of traffic," he told Maria. "I didn't know there were so many people on the island."

"It is a great day for them."

"Few foreigners, though."

"My father does not encourage them. He has the airport watched. Even the number of newsmen is limited."

"So I noticed." They were walking through the downstairs rooms toward the door when Nick paused to examine the large oil painting over a massive stone fireplace. It was of a handsome

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bearded man in military uniform. "Who's this?" he asked.

"Palidez, our liberator. Father mentioned him at dinner the other night. Founder of our country, author of our constitution, builder of this house—"

Nick studied the painting more closely. "He's missing a finger."

"Lost in the Revolution. It became a sort of symbol. He died in 1920, rich and famous—and loved by his people."

One of the servants had turned on the radio and they could hear the sounds of the stadium ceremonies. "They're starting without us," Nick said. "We'd better hurry."

"I'm ready."

He led her out to the official car, where a dark-skinned driver waited by the open door. "Too bad all your servants can't come."

"Most of them went, but the house requires so much work—you can imagine, with nine rooms on each floor."

Nick froze with his hand on the car door. "My Spanish is rusty," he said, hardly breathing. "Your father said this place is called the *Casa Neuve*—"

Maria chuckled. "I started to correct you the other night. New House would be *Casa Neuvo*. The presidential palace is called *Casa Neuve,* which means—"

"Nine House! Nine rooms on each floor! And *nine* was the word Palidez lived by!" From the car radio came the sounds of the pageant ceremonies, the rolling of drums, the blowing of bugles. "Come on! We've got to get there fast!"

"But why?"

"Don't ask questions. What I need are answers and you can give them to me." The car pulled away from the palace grounds and headed toward the stadium. "Jorge Asignar is up to something and it's no good."

"Asignar? I don't understand."

Nick Velvet leaned back in his seat, eyes closed, trying to see it all. "The thing was Asignar's idea from the start. At the airport Monday he was surprised to see nineteen players with manager and coaches and all. He didn't need them. He only needed nine men—a baseball team. Nine men who could enter the country without attracting your father's suspicions, without being noticed by his airport guards."

"Nine men—"

"Don't you see, Maria? This whole country is built on the mystical number nine. There are nines everywhere—the President and eight cabinet ministers—nine in all. Nine seashells on your national flag. And the cabinet always sits in row J at the auditorium—the ninth row, since theaters hardly ever have a row I. The country was liberated in 1899, on September 9th—the ninth day of the ninth month.

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And nine-fingered Palidez did it all. He wrote the constitution and built the palace, Nine House, with its nine rooms on each floor."

"I know all that," she said.

"Then tell me what else there is. Something in the constitution that Palidez wrote. Something that Jorge Asignar needs nine men for."

"Nine men—" And suddenly her hand flew to her mouth. "My God, the firing squad!"

It was then that the driver pulled over to the curb and turned to face them with a pistol in his hand.

Nick Velvet fired a single shot through the back of the seat, hoping his aim was good. It was—the driver crumpled sideways without a sound.

"Help shove him over," Nick told Maria. "I'll drive."

"He's one of Asignar's people," she gasped.

"He was. I'm glad I still had the gun with me. Which way should I go?"

"Straight ahead—you can see it from here, over on the left." As he drove she kept talking. "Palidez's constitution states that the President of Jabali can be removed from office and sentenced to death by a secret panel of judges in a time of national crisis. But the actual execution of a President can only be carried out by a nine-man firing squad. To insure that the firing squad itself is impartial, none of the men can be citizens of Jabali."

"So Asignar brought the Beavers in to be public executioners. He's planning to take over the country, but he wants it all nice and legal. He doesn't want the citizens upset."

"But how can he get the Beavers to shoot my father?"

"However it is, I've got to stop it. I agreed to steal a baseball team, not to provide a firing squad. Asignar suggested the pre-game pageant. He must be planning it for then."

The voice on the radio droned on in Spanish. Nick missed many words, but he got the general idea. Both teams were lined up on the field, facing the President who was standing on a raised platform. The teams carried rifles, symbolic of Jabali's Revolution, but they would soon exchange them for bats, symbolic of today's peaceful life.

"Faster!" Maria urged. "They have guns, and father is now down on the field."

Nick swung into the stadium driveway, saw a policeman signaling him away, and brushed the man aside like a fly. Then he headed the car toward the metal gates that blocked the entrance to the field. "Keep your head down," he warned Maria.

The car hit the gates with a force that cracked the windshield

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and crushed in the radiator, but they were through. The Beavers, nine of them, were facing General Tras, aiming their rifles in the air in some sort of salute. Nick drove the crippled car forward in a final burst of speed that almost bowled the players over.

"Don't shoot!" he yelled to Nesbitt, the shortstop. "It's a trick!"

There was shouting from the stands, and Nick saw soldiers running onto the field. "They're only blanks," Karowitz protested. "Asignar told us to fire over the President's head as part of the pageant."

Nick grabbed one of the rifles and ejected a blank cartridge. "Then he's somewhere with a high-powered rifle. He couldn't expect you fellows to really execute the President, but he wanted it to look that way."

General Tras was running over now, his face ashen. "What is it? What's happening?"

"Asignar is planning to kill you and make it look like an execution. Once you're dead no one would know the difference. The judges who condemned you in secret must be part of Asignar's plot."

There was the crack of a rifle, from far off, and Tras stumbled to the ground. The bullet had hit the fleshy part of his thigh. "He's on the roof, over there!" Nick shouted. He grabbed one of the rifles and then remembered they held blanks. A soldier had reached them, his rifle pointed, and Nick grabbed the soldier's rifle as a second shot sounded from the roof.

"Everybody down!" he shouted. The second shot, fired in haste, had missed. Now Jorge Asignar was up and running along the edge of the roof. Nick fired two quick shots, then took an extra few seconds to squeeze off the third round at the running figure.

Asignar went off the edge of the roof, falling without a sound, and hit the top of the Beavers' third-base dugout.

"There are men faithful to me," General Tras said as they bandaged his leg. "We will round up the rest of the plotters."

"With Asignar dead they'll be off and running," Nick told him. They were still in the center of the field, surrounded by the players and soldiers.

"How can I thank you?" Maria Tras asked Nick.

"There must be a way."

From the dugout Pop Hastin had finally fought his way through the mob. "What is all this shooting?" he demanded. "Let's get that body out of here and play ball!"

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a TOMMY and TUPPENCE BERESFORD story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

Once again the game's afoot for Blunt's Brilliant Detectives—otherwise, Tommy and Tuppence Beresford, husband-and-wife private investigators; and this time they emulate the great Hanaud, A. E. W. Mason's famous manhunter of — remember?—AT THE VILLA ROSE *and* THE HOUSE OF THE ARROW. *It all began—as it might very well have begun in a Hanaud story—with a box of poisoned chocolates sent anonymously. (Is it only in mystery stories that recipients of chocolates from an unknown person blithely go about eating them? But that criminological cliché is part of the parody) . . .*

THE HOUSE OF LURKING DEATH

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"WHAT—" BEGAN TUPPENCE, and then stopped.

She had just entered the private office of Mr. Blunt from the adjoining one marked *Clerks,* and was surprised to behold her lord and master with his eye riveted to the private peephole into the outer office.

"Ssh," said Tommy warningly. "Didn't you hear the buzzer? It's a girl—rather a nice girl—in fact, she looks to me like a frightfully nice girl. Albert is telling her all that tosh about my being engaged with Scotland Yard."

"Let *me* see," demanded Tuppence.

Somewhat unwillingly Tommy moved aside and Tuppence glued her eye to the peephole.

"She's not bad," admitted Tuppence. "And her clothes are simply the latest."

"She's perfectly lovely," said Tommy. "She's like those girls A.E.W. Mason writes about—you know, frightfully—sympathetic, beautiful, and distinctly intelligent without being too saucy. I think, yes—I certainly think—I shall be the great Hanaud this morning."

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"Hm," said Tuppence. "If there is one detective whom you are most unlike, I should say it was Hanaud. Can you do the lightning changes of personality? Can you be the great comedian, the little gutter boy, the serious sympathetic friend—all within five minutes?"

"I know this," said Tommy, rapping sharply on the desk, "I am the Captain of the Ship—and don't you forget it, Tuppence. I'm going to have her in."

He pressed the buzzer on his desk. Albert appeared ushering in the client.

The girl stopped in the doorway as though undecided. Tommy came forward.

"Come in, Mademoiselle," he said kindly, "and seat yourself here."

Tuppence choked audibly, and Tommy turned on her with a swift change of manner. His tone was menacing.

"You spoke, Miss Robinson? Ah, no, I thought not."

He turned back to the girl.

"We will not be serious or formal," he said. "You will just tell me about it, and then we will discuss the best way to help you."

"You are very kind," said the girl. "Excuse me, but are you a foreigner?"

A fresh choke from Tuppence. Tommy glared in her direction out of the corner of his eye.

"Not exactly," he said with difficulty. "But of late years I have worked a good deal abroad. My methods are the methods of the Sûreté."

"Oh!" The girl seemed impressed.

She was, as Tommy had indicated, a charming girl. Young and slim, with a trace of golden hair peeping out from under her little brown felt hat, and big serious eyes.

That she was nervous could be plainly seen. Her little hands were twisting themselves together, and she kept clasping and unclasping the catch of her red handbag.

"First of all, Mr. Blunt, I must tell you that my name is Lois Hargreaves. I live in a great rambling old-fashioned house called Thurnly Grange. It is in the heart of the country. There is the village of Thurnly nearby, but it is small and insignificant. There is plenty of hunting in winter, and we get tennis in summer, and I have never felt lonely there. Indeed, I much prefer country to town life.

"I tell you this so that you may realize that in a village like ours everything that happens is of supreme importance. About a week ago I got a box of chocolates sent through the post. There was nothing inside to indicate who they came from. Now I myself am not particularly fond of chocolates, but the others in the house are, and the box was

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passed round. As a result, everyone who had eaten any chocolates was taken ill.

"We sent for the doctor, and after various inquiries as to what other things had been eaten, he took the remains of the chocolates away with him, and had them analyzed. Mr. Blunt, those chocolates contained arsenic! Not enough to kill, but enough to make one quite ill."

"Extraordinary," commented Tommy.

"Dr. Burton was very excited over the matter. It seems that this was the third occurrence of the kind in the neighborhood. In each case a big house was selected, and the residents were taken ill after eating the mysterious chocolates. It looked as though some local person of weak intellect was playing a particularly fiendish practical joke."

"Quite so, Miss Hargreaves."

"Dr Burton put it down to political agitation—rather absurdly, I thought. But there are one or two malcontents in Thurnly village, and it seemed possible that they might have had something to do with it. Dr. Burton was very keen that I should put the whole thing in the hands of the police."

"A very natural suggestion," said Tommy. "But you have not done so, I gather."

"No," admitted the girl. "I hate the fuss and the publicity that would ensue—and you see, I know our local Inspector. I can never imagine him finding out anything! I have often seen your advertisements, and I told Dr. Burton it would be much better to call in a private detective."

"I see."

"You say a great deal about discretion in your advertisement. I take that to mean that—that—well, that you would not make anything public without my consent?"

Tommy looked at her curiously, but it was Tuppence who spoke.

"I think," she said quietly, "that it would be as well if Miss Hargreaves told us *everything*."

She laid especial stress on the last word, and Lois Hargreaves flushed nervously.

"Yes," said Tommy quickly. "Miss Robinson is right. You must tell us everything."

"You will not—" she hesitated.

"Everything you say is strictly in confidence."

"Thank you. I know that I ought to have been quite frank with you. I have a reason for not going to the police. Mr. Blunt, that box of chocolates was sent by someone in our house!"

"How do you know that, Mademoiselle?"

"It's very simple. I've got a habit of drawing a little silly thing—three fish intertwined—whenever I have a pencil in my hand. A parcel of

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silk stockings arrived from a certain shop in London not long ago. We were at the breakfast table. I'd just been marking something in the newspaper, and without thinking, I began to draw my silly little fish on the label of the parcel before cutting the string and opening it. I thought no more about the matter, but when I was examining the piece of brown paper in which the chocolates had been sent, I caught sight of the corner of the original label—most of which had been torn off. My silly little drawing was on it."

Tommy drew his chair forward.

"That is very serious. It creates, as you say, a very strong presumption that the sender of the chocolates is a member of your household. But you will forgive me if I say that I still do not see why that fact should keep you from calling in the police?"

Lois Hargreaves looked him squarely in the face.

"I will tell you, Mr. Blunt. I may want the whole thing hushed up."

Tommy retired gracefully from the position.

"In that case," he murmured, "we know where we are. I see, Miss Hargreaves, that you are not disposed to tell me who it is you suspect?"

"I suspect no one—but there are possibilities."

"Quite so. Now will you describe the household to me in detail?"

"The servants, with the exception of the parlormaid, are all old ones who have been with us many years. I must explain to you, Mr. Blunt, that I was brought up by my aunt, Lady Radclyffe, who was extremely wealthy. Her husband made a big fortune, and was knighted. It was he who bought Thurnly Grange, but he died two years after going there, and it was then that Lady Radclyffe sent for me to come and make my home with her. I was her only living relation.

"The other resident in the house was Dennis Radclyffe, her husband's nephew. I have always called him cousin, but of course he is really nothing of the kind. Aunt Lucy always said openly that she intended to leave her money, with the exception of a small provision for me, to Dennis. It was Radclyffe money, she said, and ought to go to a Radclyffe. However, when Dennis was twenty-two, she quarreled violently with him—over some debts that he had run up, I think When she died, a year later, I was astonished to find that she had made a will leaving all her money to me.

"It was, I know, a great blow to Dennis, and I felt very bad about it. I would have given him the money if he would have taken it, but is seems that that kind

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of thing can't be done. However, as soon as I was twenty-one I made a will leaving it all to him. That's the least I can do. So if I'm run over by a motor, Dennis will come into his own."

"Exactly," said Tommy. "And when were you twenty-one, if I may ask the question?"

"Just three weeks ago."

"Ah!" said Tommy. "Now will you give me fuller particulars of the members of your household at this moment?"

"Servants—or—others?"

"Both."

"The servants, as I say, have been with us some time. There is old Mrs. Holloway, the cook, and her niece Rose, the kitchenmaid. Then there are two elderly housemaids and Hannah who was my aunt's maid and who has always been devoted to me. The parlormaid is named Esther Quant, and seems a very nice quiet girl. As for ourselves, there is Miss Logan who was Aunt Lucy's companion and who runs the house for me, and Captain Radclyffe—Dennis, you know, whom I told you about, and there is a girl called Mary Chilcott, an old school friend of mine who is staying with us."

Tommy thought for a moment.

"That all seems fairly clear and straightforward, Miss Hargreaves," he said. "I take it that you have no special reason for attaching suspicion more to one person than another? You are only afraid it might prove to be—well, not a servant, shall we say?"

"That's it exactly, Mr. Blunt. I have honestly no idea who used that piece of brown paper. The address was printed, not in handwriting."

"There seems only one thing to be done," said Tommy. "I must be on the spot."

The girl looked at him inquiringly.

"I suggest that you prepare the way for the arrival of—say, Mr. and Miss Van Dusen—American friends of yours. Will you be able to do that quite naturally?"

"Oh, yes. There will be no difficulty at all. When will you come down—tomorrow or the day after?"

"Tomorrow, if you please. There is no time to waste."

"That is settled, then."

The girl rose, and held out her hand.

"One thing, Miss Hargreaves, not a word, mind, to anyone—anyone at all—that we are not what we seem."

"What do you think of it, Tuppence?" he asked, when he returned from showing the visitor out.

"I don't like it," said Tuppence decidedly. "Especially I don't like the chocolates having so little arsenic in them."

"What *do* you mean?"

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"Don't you see? All those chocolates being sent round the neighborhood were a blind. To establish the idea of a local maniac. Then, when the girl was really poisoned, it would be thought to be the same thing. You see, but for a stroke of luck, no one would ever have guessed that the chocolates were actually sent by someone in the house itself."

"That was a stroke of luck. You're right. You think it's a plot against the girl herself?"

"I'm afraid so. I remember reading about old Lady Radclyffe's will. That girl has come into a terrific lot of money."

"Yes, and she came of age and made a will three weeks ago. It looks bad—for Dennis Radclyffe. He gains by her death."

Tuppence nodded. "The worst of it is—that she thinks so too! That's why she won't have the police called in. And she must be more than half in love with him to act as she has."

"In that case," said Tommy thoughtfully "why the devil doesn't he marry her? Much simpler and safer."

Tuppence stared at him.

"You've said a mouthful," she observed. "Oh, boy! I'm getting ready to be Miss Van Dusen, you observe."

"Why rush to crime, when there is a lawful means near at hand?"

Tuppence reflected for a minute.

"I've got it," she announced. "Clearly he must have married a barmaid while at Oxford. Origin of the quarrel with his aunt. That explains everything."

"Then why not send poisoned sweets to the barmaid?" suggested Tommy. "Much more practical. I wish you wouldn't jump to these wild conclusions, Tuppence."

"They're deductions," said Tuppence, with a good deal of dignity. "This is your first *corrida,* my friend, but when you have been twenty minutes in the arena—"

Tommy flung the office cushion at her.

"Tuppence, I say, Tuppence, come here."

It was breakfast time the next morning. Tuppence hurried out of her bedroom and into the dining room. Tommy was striding up and down, the open newspaper in his hand.

"What's the matter?"

Tommy wheeled round and shoved the paper into her hand, pointing to the headlines.

MYSTERIOUS POISONING CASE
DEATHS FROM FIG SANDWICHES

Tuppence read on. This mysterious outbreak of ptomaine poisoning had occurred at Thurnly Grange. The deaths so far reported were those of Miss Lois Hargreaves, the owner of the

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house, and the parlormaid, Esther Quant. A Captain Radclyffe and a Miss Logan were reported to be still seriously ill. The cause of the outbreak was supposed to be some fig paste used in sandwiches, since another lady, a Miss Chilcott, who had not partaken of these, was reported to be quite well.

"We must get down there at once," said Tommy. "That girl! That perfectly ripping girl! Why the devil didn't I go straight down there with her yesterday?"

"If you had," said Tuppence, "you'd probably have eaten fig sandwiches too for tea, and then you'd have been dead. Come on, let's start at once. I see it says that Dennis Radclyffe is seriously ill also."

"Probably shamming, the dirty blackguard."

They arrived at the small village of Thurnly about midday. An elderly woman with red eyes opened the door to them when they arrived at Thurnly Grange.

"Look here," said Tommy quickly before she could speak, "I'm not a reporter or anything like that. Miss Hargreaves came to see me yesterday and asked me to come down here. Is there anyone I can see?"

"Dr. Burton is here now if you'd like to speak to him," said the woman doubtfully. "Or Miss Chilcott. She's making all the arrangements."

But Tommy had caught at the first suggestion.

"Dr. Burton," he said authoritatively. "I should like to see him at once."

The woman showed them into a small morning room. Five minutes later the door opened and a tall elderly man with bent shoulders and a kind but worried face, came in.

"Dr. Burton?" said Tommy. He produced his professional card. "Miss Hargreaves called on me yesterday with reference to those poisoned chocolates. I came down to investigate the matter at her request—alas, too late."

The doctor looked at him keenly. "You are Mr. Blunt himself?"

"Yes. This is my assistant, Miss Robinson."

The doctor bowed to Tuppence. "Under the circumstances, there is no need for reticence. But for the episode of the chocolates I might have believed these deaths to be the result of severe ptomaine poisoning—but ptomaine poisoning of an unusually virulent kind. There is gastro-intestinal inflammation and hemorrhage. As it is I am taking the fig paste to be analyzed."

"You suspect arsenic poisoning?"

"No. The poison, if a poison has been employed, is something far more potent and

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swift in its action. It looks more like some powerful vegetable toxin."

"I see. I should like to ask you, Dr. Burton, whether you are thoroughly convinced that Captain Radclyffe is suffering from the same form of poisoning?"

"Captain Radclyffe died at five o'clock this morning."

Tommy was utterly taken aback. The doctor prepared to depart.

"And the other victim, Miss Logan?" asked Tuppence.

"I have every reason to hope that she will recover since she has survived so far. Being an older woman, the poison seems to have had less effect on her. I will let you know the result of the analysis, Mr. Blunt. In the meantime Miss Chilcott will, I am sure, tell you anything you want to know."

As he spoke, the door opened and a girl appeared. She was tall, with a tanned face and steady blue eyes.

Dr. Burton performed the necessary introductions.

"I am glad you have come, Mr. Blunt," said Mary Chilcott. "This affair seems too terrible. Is there anything that I can tell you?"

"Where did the fig paste come from?"

"It is a special kind that comes from London. We often have it. No one suspected that this particular pot differed from any of the others. Personally I dislike the taste of figs. That explains my immunity. I cannot understand how Dennis was affected, since he was out for tea. He must have picked up a sandwich when he came home, I suppose." Tommy felt Tuppence's hand press his arm ever so slightly.

"What time did he come in?" he asked.

"I don't really know. I could find out."

"Thank you, Miss Chilcott. It doesn't matter. You have no objection, I hope, to my questioning the servants?"

"Please do anything you like, Mr. Blunt. I am very distraught. Tell me—you don't think there has been—foul play?"

Her eyes were very anxious as she put the question.

"I don't know what to think. We shall soon know."

"Yes, I suppose Dr. Burton will have the paste analyzed."

Quickly excusing herself, she went out to speak to one of the gardeners.

"You take the housemaids, Tuppence," said Tommy, "and I'll find my way to the kitchen. I say, Miss Chilcott may feel very distraught, but she doesn't look it."

Tuppence nodded assent without replying.

They met half an hour later.

"Now to pool results," said

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Tommy. "The sandwiches came out from tea and the parlormaid ate one—that's how she got it in the neck. Cook is positive Dennis Radclyffe hadn't returned when tea was cleared away. So how did *he* get poisoned?"

"He came in at a quarter to seven," said Tuppence. "Housemaid saw him from one of the windows. He had a cocktail before dinner—in the library. She was just clearing away the glass now, and luckily I got it from her before she washed it. It was after that that he complained of feeling ill."

"Good," said Tommy. "I'll take that glass along to Burton presently. Anything else?"

"I'd like you to see Hannah, the maid. She's—she's queer."

"How do you mean—queer?"

"She looks to me as though she were going off her head."

"Let me see her."

Tuppence led the way upstairs. Hannah had a small sitting room of her own. The maid sat upright on a high chair. On her knees was an open Bible. She did not look toward the two strangers as they entered. Instead she continued to read aloud to herself.

"Let hot burning coals fall upon them, let them be cast into the fire and into the pit, that they never rise up again."

"May I speak to you a minute?" asked Tommy.

Hannah made an impatient gesture with her hand.

"This is no time. The time is running short, I say. *I will follow upon mine enemies and overtake them, neither will I turn again till I have destroyed them.* So it is written. The word of the Lord has come to me. I am the scourge of the Lord."

"Mad as a hatter," murmured Tommy.

"She's been going on like that all the time," whispered Tuppence.

Tommy picked up a book that was lying open, face downward on the table. He glanced at the title and slipped it into his pocket.

Suddenly the old woman rose and turned toward them menacingly.

"Go out from here. The time is at hand! I am the flail of the Lord. The wind bloweth where it listeth—so do I destroy. The ungodly shall perish. This is a house of evil—of evil, I tell you! Beware of the wrath of the Lord whose handmaiden I am."

She advanced on them fiercely. Tommy thought it best to humor her and withdrew. As he closed the door, he saw her pick up the Bible again.

"I wonder if she's always been like that," he muttered.

He drew from his pocket the book he had picked up from the table.

"Look at that. Funny reading for an ignorant maid."

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Tuppence took the book.

"*Materia Medica*," she murmured. She looked at the flyleaf. "Edward Logan. It's an old book. Tommy, I wonder if we could see Miss Logan? Dr. Burton said she was better."

"Shall we ask Miss Chilcott?"

"No. Let's get hold of a housemaid and send her in to ask."

After a brief delay they were informed that Miss Logan would see them. They were taken into a big bedroom facing the lawn. In the bed was an old lady with white hair, her delicate face drawn by suffering.

"I have been very ill," she said faintly. "And I can't talk much, but Ellen tells me you are detectives. Lois went to consult you then? She spoke of doing so."

"Yes, Miss Logan," said Tommy. "We don't want to tire you, but perhaps you can answer a few questions. The maid, Hannah, is she quite right in her head?"

Miss Logan looked at them with obvious suprise.

"Oh, yes. She is very religious—but there is nothing really wrong with her."

Tommy held out the book he had taken from the table.

"Is this yours, Miss Logan?"

"Yes. It was one of my father's books. He was a great doctor, one of the pioneers of serum therapeutics."

Her voice rang with pride.

"Quite so," said Tommy. "I thought I knew his name," he added mendaciously. "This book now, did you lend it to Hannah?"

"To Hannah?" Miss Logan raised herself in bed with indignation. "No, indeed. She wouldn't understand the first word of it. It is a highly technical book."

"Yet I found it in Hannah's room."

"Disgraceful," said Miss Logan. "I will not have the servants touching my things."

"Where ought it to be?"

"On the bookshelf in my sitting room—or—wait, I lent it to Mary. The dear girl is very interested in herbs. She has made one or two experiments in my little kichen. I have a little place of my own you know where I brew liqueurs and make preserves in the old-fashioned way. Dear Lucy—Lady Radclyffe, you know—used to swear by my tansy tea—a wonderful thing for a cold in the head. Poor Lucy, she was subject to colds. So is Dennis. His father was my first cousin."

Tommy interrupted these reminiscences.

"This kitchen of yours? Does anyone else use it except you and Miss Chilcott?"

"Hannah clears up there. And she boils the kettle there for our early morning tea."

"Thank you, Miss Logan," said Tommy. "I hope we haven't tired you too much."

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He left the room and went downstairs, frowning to himself.

"There is something here, my dear Mr. Ricardo, that I do not understand."

"I hate this house," said Tuppence with a shiver. "Let's go for a long walk and try to think things out."

Tommy complied and they set out. First they left the cocktail glass at the doctor's house and then set off for a tramp across country.

"There are so many possibilities," said Tommy, "and yet all of them seem wild and improbable. Supposing Dennis Radclyffe put the poison in the sandwiches. He knew he would be out to tea. That seems fairly plain sailing."

"Yes," said Tuppence, "but then we can put against that the fact that he was poisoned himself—so that seems to rule him out. There is one person we mustn't forget—Hannah."

"Hannah?"

"People do all sorts of queer things when they have religious mania."

"She is pretty far gone with it too," said Tommy. "We ought to drop a word to Dr. Burton about it."

"It must have come on very rapidly," said Tuppence. "That is if we go by what Miss Logan said."

"I believe religious mania does," said Tommy. "I mean, you go on singing hymns in your bedroom with the door open for years, and then you go suddenly right over the line and become violent."

"There is certainly more evidence against Hannah than against anybody else," said Tuppence thoughtfully, "and yet I have an idea—"

"Yes?" Tommy encouraged.

"It is not really an idea. I suppose it is just a prejudice."

"A prejudice against someone?"

Tuppence nodded. "Tommy—did *you* like Mary Chilcott?"

Tommy considered. "Yes, I think I did. She struck me as extremely capable and businesslike—perhaps a shade too much so—but very reliable."

"You didn't think it was odd that she didn't seem more upset?"

"Well, in a way that is a point in her favor. I mean, if she had done anything wrong, she would make a point of being upset—lay it on rather thick."

"I suppose so," said Tuppence. "And anyway there doesn't seem to be any motive in her case. One doesn't see what good this wholesale slaughter can do her."

"I suppose the servants are not concerned?"

"It doesn't seem likely. They seem a quiet lot. I wonder what Esther Quant, the parlormaid, was like."

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"You mean, that if she was young and good-looking there was a chance she was mixed up in it."

"That is what I mean." Tuppence sighed. "It is all very discouraging."

"Well, I suppose the police will get down to it all right," said Tommy.

"Probably. I should like it to be us. By the way, did you notice a lot of small red dots on Miss Logan's arm?"

I don't think I did. What about them?"

"They looked as though they were made by a hypodermic syringe," said Tuppence.

"Probably Dr. Burton gave her a hypodermic injection of some kind."

"Oh, very likely. But he wouldn't give her about forty."

"Dope?" suggested Tommy helpfully.

"I thought of that," said Tuppence, "but her eyes were all right. You would see at once if it was cocaine or morphine. Besides she doesn't look that sort."

"Most respectable and God-fearing" agreed Tommy.

"It is all very difficult," said Tuppence. "We have talked and talked and we don't seem any nearer now than we were. Don't let's forget to call at the doctor's on our way home."

The doctor's door was opened by a lanky boy of about fifteen.

"Mr Blunt?" he inquired. "Yes, the doctor is out but he left a note for you in case you should call."

He handed them the note and Tommy tore it open.

"Dear Mr. Blunt,

There is reason to believe that the poison was ricin, a vegetable toxalbumose of tremendous potency. Please keep this to yourself for the present."

"Ricin," he murmured. "Know anything about it, Tuppence? You used to be well up in these things."

"Ricin," said Tuppence thoughtfully. "You get it out of castor oil, I believe."

"I never did take kindly to castor oil," said Tommy.

"You get ricin from the seeds of the castor oil plant. I believe I saw some castor oil plants in the garden this morning—big things with glossy leaves."

"You mean that someone extracted the stuff on the premises? Could Hannah do such a thing?"

Tuppence shook her head. "Doesn't seem likely. She wouldn't know enough."

Suddenly Tommy gave an exclamation.

"That book! Have I got it in my pocket still? Yes." He took it out and turned over the leaves. "I thought so. Here's the page it was open at this morning. Do you see, Tuppence? Ricin!"

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Tuppence seized the book. "Can you make head or tail of it? I can't," said Tommy.

"It's clear enough to me," said Tuppence. She walked along, reading busily. Presently she shut the book with a bang. They were now approaching the house again.

"Tommy, will you leave this to me? Just for once, you see, I am the bull that has been more than twenty minutes in the arena."

"You shall be the Captain of the Ship, Tuppence," he said gravely. "We've got to get to the bottom of this."

"First of all," said Tuppence as they entered the house, "I must ask Miss Logan one more question."

She ran upstairs. Tommy followed her. She rapped sharply on the door, and went in.

"Is that you, my dear?" said Miss Logan. "You know you are much too young and pretty to be a detective. Have you found out anything?"

"Yes," said Tuppence. "I have."

Miss Logan looked at her questioningly.

"I don't know about being pretty," went on Tuppence, "but being young, I happened to work in a hospital during the War. I know something about serum therapeutics. I happen to know that when ricin is injected in small doses hypodermically, immunity is produced—antiricin is formed. That fact paved the way for the foundation of serum therapeutics.

"You knew that, Miss Logan. You injected ricin for some time hypodermically into y o u r s e l f. Then you let yourself be poisoned with the rest. You helped your father in his work, and you knew all about ricin and how to obtain it and extract it from the seeds. You chose a day when Dennis Radclyffe was out for tea. It wouldn't do for him to be poisoned at the same time—he might die before Lois Hargreaves. So long as she died first, he inherited her money, and at his death it passes to you, his next of kin. You remember, you told us this morning that his father was your first cousin."

The old lady stared.

Suddenly a wild figure burst in from the adjoining room. It was Hannah. In her hand she held a lighted torch which she waved frantically.

"Truth has been spoken. That is the wicked one! I saw her reading the book and smiling to herself and I knew. I found the book and the page—but it said nothing to me. But the voice of the Lord spoke to me. She hated my mistress, her ladyship. She was always jealous and envious. She hated my own sweet Miss Lois. But the wicked shall perish, the fire of the Lord shall consume them."

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Waving her torch she sprang forward to the bed.

A cry arose from the old lady.

"Take her away! It's true—but take her away."

Tuppence flung herself on Hannah, but the woman managed to set fire to the curtains of the bed before Tuppence could get the torch from her and stamp on it. Tommy, however, had rushed in from the landing outside. He tore down the bed hangings and managed to stifle the flames with a rug. Then he rushed to Tuppence's assistance and between them they subdued Hannah just as Dr. Burton came hurrying in.

A very few words sufficed to inform him of the situation.

He hurried to the bedside, lifted Miss Logan's hand, then uttered a sharp exclamation.

"The shock of fire has been too much for her. She's dead. Perhaps it is just as well under the circumstances."

He paused and then added, "There was ricin in the cocktail glass as well."

"It's the best thing that could have happened," said Tommy when they had relinquished Hannah to the doctor's care, and were alone together. "Tuppence, you were simply marvelous."

"There wasn't much Hanaud about it," said Tuppence.

"It was too serious for play-acting. I still can't bear to think of that girl. I won't think of her. But as I said before, you were marvelous. The honors are with you. To use a familiar quotation, 'It is a great advantage to be intelligent and not to look it.'"

"Tommy," said Tuppence. "You're a beast."

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WAITING FOR THE AX

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

I WAS HALFWAY DOWN THE BLOCK when I heard the screams and turned to see the woman running from the front steps of that house across the street. She was easy to see: she was all in white, still wearing the uniform of the restaurant where, I learned later, she worked.

I was the only person in sight at that hour—nearly 1:00 A.M. Two cars passed before she spotted me. I could see the drivers turn and look, but neither of them stopped. You know—the usual big-city stuff: don't get involved. I wasn't too keen on getting involved myself, for reasons of my own, but I hadn't much choice; she ran across and grabbed me by the arm.

She was trying to speak, but she was out of breath from all the screaming and running. She held on to me for dear life, nearly toppling me over—she was a big, heavy-set woman, almost as tall as I was. I steadied her and said, "Okay, sister, what's the trouble?"

She gobbled for a minute, then gasped out, "In the hall—covered with blood."

I was expecting by this time that lights would be going on and windows opened all along the block, but there wasn't a sign of it. If her screams had wakened anybody, they were staying discreetly quiet. In that neighborhood they must have been used to strange noises at night, including sirens. All I

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wanted was to shut her up before a prowl car came by and started a real hullabaloo, but I didn't have a chance of getting rid of her. She kept tugging at me until I either had to knock her down, and then really have somebody come running to the rescue, or go along with her.

I didn't care to be dragged along as if she had me in tow, so I managed to disengage myself and we hurried together back to the door she'd left open. I wondered why nobody in the rooming house itself had been aroused. The reason was probably threefold: she hadn't started screaming until she was three or four houses away, and sounds of disturbance were too common for anyone to be bothered, and most of the inhabitants fell asleep too drunk or too doped to be wakened by Gabriel's trumpet or a five-alarm fire.

There was a dim light in the ceiling over the stairs, and at their foot, sprawled face down in the narrow hall, lay the body of a man, obviously dead by violence. The back of his skull was a bloody pulp from which hair and splinters of bone and scraps of brain tissue stuck out, and a congealing puddle of blood was seeping through the unpainted boards around his head. I felt sick. There was no weapon in sight.

"I came home," the woman chattered breathlessly. "I work till midnight at a drive-in and I always get home around this time. The front door's always unlocked; we lock our own doors. I almost *stepped* on him."

"Who is it?" I asked. "Do you know?"

"Sure—it's Mr. Tooley, from the top floor. I live on the second."

"How can you tell when you can't see his face?"

For answer she pointed to something sticking out from underneath him—a big piece of heavy cardboard, tied in back by a cord around his neck.

"Don't touch it!" she said sharply. I wasn't going to. "They always say on the TV shows not to touch the body. I've seen that board often enough. It's what he wears—wore—around the streets, giving away his tracts."

"'Prepare to meet thy God'—that kind of thing?"

She giggled, more from hysteria than amusement.

"Fancier than that—something like 'Repent today, tomorrow may be too late, hell yawns for the unbeliever'."

She didn't need to tell me. It was only late that afternoon that I'd seen him myself, not two blocks from my office, on my way to the lot where I keep my car parked. A ragged man with an untrimmed beard, a fringe of long greasy hair around his bald spot, walking slowly and pressing

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his grubby little tracts on embarrassed passers-by. I didn't see anybody give him money, but he must have taken in enough to pay for his rent and to buy food. From his looks there wasn't much left over for clothing.

I thought fast.

"Look," I said abruptly, "we're wasting time. We've got to phone the police, and we'd better say you just found him, or they'll check when you got off the bus and wonder what you've been doing for the past ten minutes. Where's your phone?"

"There isn't one, except in the manager's office, and he doesn't live in. He keeps the office door locked at night. If we want to phone we have to go out."

"Where's the nearest?"

"There's an all-night drug store two blocks away."

"Okay. Do you want to make the call, or shall I?"

I knew what she'd say; she couldn't go near him or look at him.

"Me. I'm not going to stand by—this—till somebody comes; and I can't step over him to go up to my room—I just couldn't."

"You shouldn't, anyway. You'll have to wait and give your story to the police when they get here. All right, go ahead and phone."

She popped out again like before, and ran down the empty street, only this time she wasn't yelling.

I waited till she had turned the corner, watching from the door. Then I stooped down and with my left hand turned him just enough to get the little notebook out of his breast pocket. I use my left hand for most things—my right hand is an iron hook, and I didn't want to get blood on that. I had a bad minute when I straightened up and slipped in that bloody puddle, but I saved myself by grabbing the wall.

She'd have to stick there with him alone till the cops came, unless she wanted to wake one of the other roomers. I hope the police don't blame it on her, poor woman, but if they do she'll be able to prove an alibi for the time the doctor will say he was killed. Her bus hadn't yet stopped—I'd have heard it. Maybe she'd have sense enough not to mention me at all, or maybe they'd think I was a hallucination or an invention to account for her delay in calling them. Who was I, and where was I? She couldn't tell them.

My car was parked two streets away. I made it without meeting anybody.

And I had the notebook. That's why I'd been hanging around there when the woman found me.

I get jittery when things happen too suddenly. As I saw this woman turn the corner and head straight for that house, of course I had to wait, and make a new

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plan. Which I'd done, as soon as she came out screeching. Considering how shot my nerves were, it was pretty quick thinking, if I do say so myself.

Back home in my own apartment I locked the door, pulled down the shades, turned on the lights, and examined myself all over. There was blood on my left hand. I must have got it there when I felt beneath him for his pocket. There was none on my sleeve. I scrubbed the blood off and washed it down the drain. Then I went from the bathroom to the kitchen and poured myself a stiff drink—and boy, did I need one.

The whole thing was so damned stupid. To begin with, my assuming—as I had done at first—that just getting hold of the notebook and leaving him alive would save me, or do me the least bit of good. What was to stop him then from writing it all out in another notebook, or even leaking it to some newspaper columnist, if he was worldly enough nowadays to know that such a thing existed?

It was a very appropriate vengeance—it was the iron hook where my right hand used to be that had done him in, and it was thanks to him I had that iron hook.

And yet, come to think of it, shouldn't I in some twisted way be grateful to him? If I hadn't been disabled, and so turned down by the draft board, I wouldn't have been kept out of the army and the war—the Korean War, that was—and so I wouldn't have been able to take advantage of the opportunity that came my way. While the rest of my age-group were fighting or waiting to be sent to fight, I was right here beginning the quick climb up that has put me, before 40, where I am today. Rich, respected, well-known in the circles that matter to me, about to marry higher up still, all sorts of even bigger possibilities still open to me—and all of it suddenly threatened by the only person on earth who could have exposed me to ridicule and scorn and dumped me back to the miserable place where I'd started. No wonder I had panicked.

Somehow, after Jim—I always think of him as Jim, whatever he may have called himself later—after Jim disappeared for keeps, scared himself then of being involved, I took for granted that was the end of him. Where I was going—where I have gone—he didn't exist. He was a part of the hidden past—especially after Mother, my last link with it, died—and would stay hidden. Actually, I thought he must be long dead, since he'd never made any attempt to get in touch with me. It was the worst shock of my life when I recognized him this afternoon—incredible,

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that ragged fanatic was Jim! And if I hadn't been so shocked I'd have turned on my heel and got away before *he* recognized *me*.

Yes, and then he'd still be alive and I'd know it now and be worried sick. All the worse that he turned out as he had, for who can figure out what a lunatic might do? All the people, from my fiancée down, who thought that hand had been blown off in Korea—all the people (and Lucy would be the first, I'm not fooled about that) who would turn me into a laughing-stock and an object of contempt, if they knew the true story! I shuddered. I'm absolutely set for the second vice-presidency when McIntosh retires, but they'd change their minds in a second if the cover story I've lived under so long was revealed as false. I must have been mad not to have made sure long ago that Jim was no danger to me.

But now the danger was over forever, and there was no way I could be connected.

The whole thing had to be improvised fast, once I'd seen and recognized him, and he'd seen and recognized me. I didn't have time to make any careful, sensible plan. I did start to turn away from him, but it was too late. He grabbed me by the shoulder. (Eight hours later, so did the woman who had stumbled on his corpse. But *that* hadn't been my plan.

"Brother," he said, in that hoarse voice I remembered so well—do all these nuts call each other brother?—"you are an answer to prayer."

"Not my prayer," I said. "I thought you were dead."

"No, by the grace of God. I did run away—you know that. I was away a long time. And then I was redeemed. I became a new man, and my mission on earth was revealed to me. I came back as the spirit commanded, and I am giving what years God spares me to try to bring other souls out of the darkness."

"And yours most of all," he went on. "I went to the old neighborhood and I inquired everywhere, but nobody had any news of you. I feared what had happened had been fatal and that you had died in the sins I had taught you, and were in hell. For three years I have been searching for you in vain."

Naturally, heaven be praised. It would never enter his mind that I had moved into a different world from the one we had once known. I'd had plenty of good publicity—"Young Man of the Year," that sort of thing; but Jim, either the way he had been or the way he was now, wouldn't have read the business sections of newspapers (or the society sections when Lucy and I announced our engagement) or the kind of business magazines in

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which my name appeared. If it had even occurred to him to look me up in the phone book he wouldn't have found me; my home number's unlisted. And of course he'd never dream of my present position. It was just pure bad luck that we'd run across each other in a big city like this. It must have been a new route for him; surely, as a rule, he hung around the less prosperous parts of the city.

Well, it had been bad luck for him in the end, not for me. No thanks to myself, either; as I said, I just panicked and acted stupidly. Suppose that woman had come in just a few minutes earlier and caught me in the act?

All I wanted this afternoon was to get away and lose him, till I could decide what to do next. But he held on to me, and I could only stand there sweating, hoping desperately that nobody who knew me would pass by.

He kept on talking, and finally what he was saying penetrated.

"But at least I won't die with that sin unconfessed. I've made sure that if I couldn't find you, I'd die with my conscience clear. I've got it all written down, here"—he tapped the breast pocket of his filthy coat—"and if I drop dead in the Lord's service—and I may any time, I've had one heart attack already—they'll find my full confession on my body."

Then he pulled out this little notebook, with a torn blue cover, and before I could move he put it back again.

"It's all here," he said. "Every word of what happened. I'd have testified to it openly long ago, but I wanted to make sure first whether you were still living or not, so that if you were, you too could win God's forgiveness by contrition. So now, brother, will you join me? Let us seek out the mission for which I distribute these tracts, and testify in open meeting and cleanse our souls at last."

It was a wonder *I* didn't have a heart attack. All these years, all my hard work, all my single-minded effort to build up a new life, a new place in society—and now this maniac could ruin everything.

I could hardly think. All I could come up with was some means of delay, until I could find a way to keep him quiet. And as I said, in my bewilderment, like a fool I felt I had to get hold of that notebook, without considering that the only real way out was to see to it that he could never endanger me again. As it turned out, my subconscious took care of me—but no credit to that "incisive reasoning power" that has been ascribed to me.

I could only say, "Let's talk it over first, Jim. Let's meet somewhere and talk things over."

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All he said was, "Don't call me Jim—that's not my name any more."

"All right, whatever you call yourself now. We can't decide anything this important while standing here on the street. Let's meet in private—tonight, if you want."

I stood there, frantic, while he considered. Then he nodded and said, "Very well, brother. Where do you live?"

Oh, no—I wasn't going to have that figure of fun asking the doorman in my posh apartment house for me. I shook my head.

"Better if I go to your place. I don't live alone," I lied.

"Well—I keep myself to myself in that house. They're a bunch of hardened sinners there. They jeer at me or get rough when I try to help them, and I don't want them mixing in my private affairs."

"Whatever you say."

"Meet me at my corner tonight, and I'll take you in quietly." He gave me the address. "But it'll have to be late; I go around the the big movie houses at night and hand out the messages to the profligates as they leave. Dens of iniquity, that's what they are. I don't get home usually till after midnight. I'll meet you at twelve thirty."

"Fine," I said, crazy to get away.

So he let me go at last, and I was shaking all over and hardly able to drive. I was supposed to take Lucy out to dinner, but I couldn't face it. I called her and managed to make an excuse; Lucy always understands when I say it's business. I couldn't eat and I didn't dare drink, for fear he'd smell it on me. I just sat there smoking one cigarette after another and trying to cook up some scheme to get that notebook away from him.

Well, subconsciously I suppose I knew all along there was only one way.

He was there waiting.

The front door was unlocked and we went in together. He started toward the stairs, then suddenly he stopped short.

"No," he said, "I don't want you in my own room. I can feel your vibrations and I don't like them. I can smell tobacco on you, that vile weed. I don't feel the strength in my spirit to convince you now. We'll put it off to another time. Tell me where to find you."

I had a vision of him coming to the office and asking for me. I groped for some way to finish the thing there and then.

"Look," I said, "give me a chance right now to explain the harm it would do to uncover all that old stuff. It's long ago and best forgotten. I haven't blamed you for this, have I?"

And I raised the iron hook and

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held it in front of his face.

"No," he said, "I blame myself. Go ahead, then; if you want to talk, talk here." He peered at the closed doors beyond us. "The manager doesn't sleep here and there's only one room on this floor occupied at night, and that lost soul steeps himself in alcohol and nothing could waken him. Sometimes there have been fights down here and he never even knew." He waved toward a door lost in the shadows.

I was so drained I could scarcely speak.

"If you're sorry for what happened," I finally managed, "then the only way you can make it up to me is to forget it, to keep it a secret as I've done. I've worked hard, Jim, and made something of myself; our whole past is like a bad dream that I don't want to remember."

Then I made a mistake.

"If you need money—"

His eyes blazed.

"You're living a lie, brother!" he cried hoarsely. "You've forced me all these years to live one too, because I felt I owed it to you not to save my own soul at the expense of yours. But no more. Hear me?—no more! You talk about money when all I care about is the redemption of my immortal soul. And yours! And yours! I'll speak no more to you tonight."

I hadn't consciously planned it that way, but for a moment too went mad. I've often rea how they say you don't remembe I remember, but I could no mor help myself than if I had bee a bolt of lightning.

He turned away from me t mount the stairs, and like an au tomaton I raised my right arn and brought the iron hook heavil against the back of his head.

He didn't utter another word just fell on his face and lay there with the blood beginning to see out and spread around him.

Everything was whirling abou me and I could hardly breathe Shreds of thought raced through my mind. Was he dead? He must be—nobody could survive a blow like that. Now he could never expose me. But I must escape No, I must get the notebook first.

And then, to my horror, I heard a shout from that room down the hall.

"Go away!" a man's voice called out, and there was the noise of something heavy landing on the floor.

Without realizing it I was flying out of there and down the street.

Now I am sure the drunk in that room was only fighting a nightmare in his sodden sleep. But that came on later reflection. At the moment I dared not return, but I also could not go away. I crossed the dark, silent street and stood there trying to put my thoughts in order. Finally I decid-

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I would wait a few minutes
d then, if there was no sign
disturbance, go quietly back.
nust get that notebook—it was
ll an obsession in me.

Ten minutes later by my watch
was as still as it had been.
was about to cross over when
at woman turned the corner. I
ited for her to pass the house.
stead, she entered it. Before I
uld think what to do next, she
n screaming into the street. The
st I improvised as best I could.

But now I was safe at last,
fe forever: my career, my mar-
ge, my reputation. There would
no scandal. There would be
ly the motiveless murder of a
nniless, harmless lunatic by
erson or persons unknown."

I poured myself another drink
d opened the notebook. Yes,
was all there.

"I was a wild and wicked young
an," the writing began, "before,
the mercy of God, I was led
see the evil of my ways, at
e very time I was fleeing from
spicion of crime and from the
emory of the awful wrong I had
ought upon a youth whom I
yself had corrupted. If I could
ly know that he is alive today,
d where, I would labor to have
m join me in public confession
f our joint sinfulness, and even
our crimes are beyond legal
unishment now, I would seek to
ave some punishment given us."

Where in the world had he acquired that stilted style? From the tracts, I suppose, which he distributed for some mission and which must have been his only reading for years.

He gave a long list of our petty thefts. Then he went on: "Unless or until I know that my comrade in crime is living, I shall carry with me always this confession, so that if I should die with my sins unshriven he at least will have an opportunity to cleanse his soul."

Then he gave both our names—his real name before he became "Tooley"—mine which has never been changed; and every other name, date, and place so that they could be verified and I would have no escape! The only time I ever went under an alias was in those weeks at the County Hospital, while they were trying to save my infected hand and finally had to amputate it. And it was he himself who had given a false name and address (and a false story) for me, before he checked me in and then vanished for good. I was too weak and ill to notice or care. Mother never even knew where I was—I'd just disappeared, the way Jim used to do, and I suppose she thought I'd joined him, despite all her threats and pleas. I never explained when I came back to her.

Mother's long since dead—Father died when I was a baby. She had her own sorrows

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and troubles, I suppose, but she didn't belong in my new world. I supported her till she died; nobody can ever say I left my mother uncared for. I never mentioned her to my new acquaintances, and they took it for granted that I was an orphan.

"We went," the notebook continued (I'll never forget a word of it; I'll burn it safely tonight), "from evil to evil. We smoked, we drank, we consorted with harlots. He was 18 and I was 26, but it amused me to lead his hero worship astray.

"For years, ever since I dropped out of school, I had lived by occasional unskilled jobs and constant thievery. I taught him that too, and though he stayed in school and was the good boy at home, I couldn't count all the dishonest enterprises in which I trained him as my accomplice. We were never caught. No violence, though. That, thank God, I have never had on my conscience."

Meaning, Jim, that you were a coward, and since I emulated you, so was I.

"There came a day"—he gave the date and place—"when I planned a major crime. There was a man"—he named him—"who owned a meat-packing plant near where I lived"—he gave the address. "An alley ran back of the plant, and I discovered it gave access to an almost hidden, small, dirty window on the ground floo through which I could see storage room. It occurred to m that we could get in through th window late at night."

Yes, and more fool he! Ha he never heard of nigh watchmen?

Anyway, Jim's idea of gettin in there, hiding among the crate and bundles if we had to, an sneaking out with all we coul carry out to use or sell, depende entirely on that window in th narrow alley, which itself wa almost concealed from the slum my street in the rundown neighborhood that was m boyhood environment, and Jim's.

His idea was that I, the slimme and shorter of the two, coul punch the window open, pul away the rest of the glass, climb inside, then unbolt the side doo for him.

We never made it. We had nc glass cutter. I didn't even have brains enough to protect my hanc with a glove. When I couldn't pry the window open, I let loose and put my fist through the dirty glass.

I cut my hand to the bone, from the wrist down. The blood poured out—it didn't seep out like the blood I saw tonight. We were shocked and frightened, both of us. Jim wrapped his handkerchief around it and took me home. Mother woke up. I told her I had fallen on a sharp piece of

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iron in the gutter. She scolded as usual while she cleaned the wound and bandaged my hand. I went to bed and after a while it stopped bleeding.

Jim told me afterward, before he left, that he went to inspect the alley and found the window had been repaired. Nobody ever connected us with it, or was even sure there had been an attempt at a break-in.

My hand kept on hurting till I couldn't sleep from the pain. I couldn't use it and had to stay home from school. The hand swelled up and my fingers turned purple. I took aspirins till I was dizzy. Then my hand grew white and waxy-looking, and a red bracelet formed on the wrist above the biggest cut. I was in terrible pain and had a high fever.

That was when Jim showed up again—sometimes I didn't see him for days, when he was away somewhere on one of his nefarious exploits, or maybe just on a binge—and took one look and said I had to go to a hospital fast. I was alone in the apartment; Mother was away on one of her cleaning jobs.

We had to wait a long time at the clinic. I was crying with pain. Finally a doctor unwound the bandage—pretty grubby by now. "Gangrene," he said right away, and sent me to surgery. They found it was too late to do anything but amputate.

So that was the pleasant story of my youth he was planning to tell the world. And just because somewhere, somehow, he'd got religion and was all set to make me suffer too! I've worked hard all these years, ever since that first opportunity when Mr. McGregor, the high-school principal, sympathized with my struggle to get a diploma, handicapped as I was, and talked to his cousin who was one of the executives of my company, and wangled a job for me where I could use only my left hand. The cousin took an interest in me and gradually I used the good mind I've always had and began to work myself up. He's long since retired and by now I'm far ahead of where he ever was. I started as his protégé but I made the rest on my own, and I made a place for myself in a world I never knew existed when I was 18—Lucy's world. I've told that story about losing my hand in Korea so long now that I'd almost forgotten it wasn't true. Somebody says somewhere that we're all impostors of one kind or another, if only to ourselves.

And then to have the whole thing threatened by a man I'd thought long dead. Mother was the last reminder of my unsavory past, and after she died I lived only in the present and the bright future. Suppose I'd never found out he was alive and here in the

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city, all set like a time bomb to destroy my entire career! I shuddered worse than I'd shuddered when I saw him lying there in that hallway.

That hadn't been pleasant, either. The scene kept passing before me like a film—our entering the house, his cantankerous talk, his turning to leave me, my sudden despairing rage, the fatal blow. And then the sight of him sprawled there, and stooping down for the notebook, choking back the need to retch. Then that drunken shout, and my flight, and the woman, and the return. And finally reaching down again and forcing myself to put my hand in his pocket, and the awful minute when I stood up with the notebook and almost slipped in his blood and saved myself only by holding on to the greasy wallpaper—

The greasy wallpaper. I remember its dirty slickness against my fingers.

An iron hook can't feel.

It must have been the *left* side of that narrow hall I had grabbed, not the right.

That blood on my left hand. I must have left bloody fingerprints on the wall.

And of course I've been fingerprinted over and over, on file in a dozen places—when I was bonded, when I was appointed to that committee and had to have security clearance, when I led the volunteer Civil Defense registration, heaven knows what other times.

So that's that. I've lost out after all.

There's no sense trying to run and I haven't the nerve to kill myself. There's nothing to do but wait for the ax to fall. Or give myself up and finally get it over with.

And now for the first time I realize truly what I did. For the first time I *feel* that I am a murderer.

Worse than a murderer. A fratricide.

I'd spent my whole life since I was 18 trying to forget him.

But he was my brother. My own older brother, my childhood hero.

My brother.

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A little gem from THE FOUR MILLION*—about a man who came two thousand miles to keep a twenty-year-old appointment—by one of the Old Masters and one of America's greatest talespinners . . .*

AFTER TWENTY YEARS

by O. HENRY

THE POLICEMAN ON THE BEAT moved up the avenue impressively. The impressiveness was habitual and not for show, for spectators were few. The time was barely ten o'clock at night, but chilly gusts of wind with a taste of rain in them had well nigh depeopled the streets.

Trying doors as he went, twirling his club with many intricate and artful movements, turning now and then to cast his watchful eye down the pacific thoroughfare, the officer, with his stalwart form and slight swagger, made a fine picture of a guardian of the peace. The vicinity was one that kept early hours. Now and then you might see the lights of a cigar store or of an all-night lunch counter; but the majority of the doors belonged to business places that had long since been closed.

When about midway of a certain block the policeman suddenly slowed his walk. In the doorway of a darkened hardware store a man leaned, with an unlighted cigar in his mouth. As the policeman walked up to him the man spoke up quickly.

"It's all right, officer," he said reassuringly. "I'm just waiting for a friend. It's an appointment made twenty years ago. Sounds a little funny to you, doesn't it? Well, I'll explain if you'd like to make certain it's all straight. About that long ago there used to be a restaurant where this store stands—'Big Joe' Brady's."

"Until five years ago," said the policeman. "It was torn down then."

The man in the doorway struck a match and lit his cigar. The light showed a pale, square-jawed face with keen eyes and a little white scar near his right eyebrow. His scarfpin was a large diamond, oddly set.

"Twenty years ago tonight," said the man. "I dined here at 'Big Joe' Brady's with Jimmy Wells, my best chum, and the finest chap in the world. He and I were raised

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here in New York, just like two brothers, together. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West to make my fortune. You couldn't have dragged Jimmy out of New York: he thought it was the only place on earth. Well, we agreed that night that we would meet here again exactly twenty years from that date and time, no matter what our conditions might be or from what distance we might have to come. We figured that in twenty years each of us ought to have our destiny worked out and our fortunes made, whatever they were going to be."

"It sounds pretty interesting," said the policeman. "Rather a long time between meets, though, it seems to me. Haven't you heard from your friend since you left?"

"Well, yes, for a time we corresponded," said the other. "But after a year or two we lost track of each other. You see, the West is a pretty big proposition, and I kept hustling around over it pretty lively. But I know Jimmy will meet me here if he's alive, for he always was the truest, staunchest old chap in the world. He'll never forget. I came two thousand miles to stand in this door tonight, and it's worth it if my old partner turns up."

The waiting man pulled out a handsome watch, the lids of it set with small diamonds.

"Three minutes to ten," he announced. "It was exactly ten o'clock when we parted here at the restaurant door."

"Did pretty well out West, didn't you?" asked the policeman.

"You bet! I hope Jimmy has done half as well. He was a kind of plodder, though, good fellow as he was. I've had to compete with some of the sharpest wits going to get my pile. A man gets in a groove in New York. It takes the West to put a razor-edge on him."

The policeman twirled his club.

"I'll be on my way. Hope your friend comes around all right. Going to call time on him sharp?"

"I should say not!" said the other. "I'll give him half an hour at least. If Jimmy is alive on earth he'll be here by that time. So long, officer."

"Good night, sir," said the policeman, passing along on his beat, trying doors as he went.

There was now a fine, cold drizzle falling, and the wind had risen from its uncertain puffs into a steady blow. The few foot passengers astir in that quarter hurried dismally and silently along with coat collars turned high and pocketed hands. And in the door of the hardware store the man who had come two thousand miles to fill an appointment, uncertain almost to absurdity, with the friend of his youth, smoked his cigar and waited.

About twenty minutes he

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waited, and then a tall man in a long overcoat, with collar turned up to his ears, hurried across from the opposite side of the street.

"Is that you, Bob?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Is that you, Jimmy Wells?" cried the man in the door.

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed the new arrival, grasping both the other's hands with his own. "It's Bob, sure as fate. I was certain I'd find you here if you were still in existence. Well, well, well!—twenty years is a long time. The old restaurant's gone, Bob. I wish it had lasted, so we could have had another dinner there. How has the West treated you, old man?"

"Bully; it has given me everything I asked it for. You've changed lots, Jimmy. I never thought you were so tall by two or three inches."

"Oh, I grew a bit after I was twenty."

"Doing well in New York, Jimmy?"

"Moderately. I have a position in one of the city departments. Come on, Bob; we'll go around to a place I know of, and have a good long talk about old times."

The two men started up the street, arm in arm. The man from the West, his egotism enlarged by success, was beginning to outline the history of his career. The other, submerged in his overcoat, listened with interest.

At the corner stood a drug store, brilliant with electric lights. When they came into this glare each of them turned to gaze on the other's face.

The man from the West stopped suddenly and released his arm.

"You're not Jimmy Wells," he snapped. "Twenty years is a long time but not long enough to change a man's nose from a Roman to a pug."

"It sometimes changes a good man into a bad one," said the tall man. "You've been under arrest for ten minutes, 'Silky' Bob. Chicago thinks you may have dropped over our way and wires us she wants to have a chat with you. Going quietly, are you? That's sensible. Now, before we go to the station here's a note I was asked to hand you. You may read it here at the window. It's from Patrolman Wells."

The man from the West unfolded the little piece of paper handed him. His hand was steady when he began to read, but it trembled a little by the time he had finished. The note was short.

Bob: I was at the appointed place on time. When you struck the match to light your cigar I saw it was the face of the man wanted in Chicago. Somehow I couldn't do it myself, so I went around and got a plainclothes man to do the job.

Jimmy.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

(separate stories from husband and wife—simultaneously!)

Here are the 336th and 337th "first stories" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, and to the best of our recollection this is the first time in 28 years that EQMM has published two "first stories" back to back, one by a new woman writer and the other by her husband. If we didn't tell you which one wrote which story, we are certain you would guess correctly. While both stories have political implications, one might be called emotionally feminine, and the other, emotionally masculine . . .

At the time of this writing, Stella Ann Moran (called "Sam" by her family and friends) and William Patrick Moran, Jr. (usually called "Pat") are both 29 years old, and have been married four and a half years. Both were born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama, and both are devoted to reading, music, and bridge. (They sound like an ideal married couple!)

Mrs. Moran has been a secretary for nine years, and has studied portrait painting for the past four. Lieutenant Moran is a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, and he loves golf and basketball.

Since their marriage the Morans have lived in Jacksonville, Florida, and in San Diego, Long Beach, and Monterey, California. At the time they simultaneously submitted their "first stories" they were living in Japan, at the end of Lieutenant Moran's first year of a three-year tour of duty.

Oh, yes, we've omitted one mutual interest of the Morans: both are planning to do much more writing, especially in the mystery field. Good luck—and we expect to be hearing from both of you!

Now, in the tradition of "ladies first" . . .

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NO PLACE TO RUN

by STELLA ANN MORAN

He could see Janet through the sheer kitchen curtains as she sat at the table, stirring whatever was in the cup. Her dark hair swung forward in glossy wings, almost covering her face as she stared down at a slip of yellow paper crumpled in her left hand. She hadn't heard him, he was sure; she didn't seem to realize that there was anyone else in the world. So far, so good—he needed every break he could get.

The little decal on her car window said *Enterprise,* and the ship was deployed, that much he knew; so she should be alone in the house. Most of the families in this neighborhood seemed to have kids, as evidenced by toys and bikes littering garages and driveways; but there were no toys or bikes visible here, so he had chosen this house as the safest place to hide. They wouldn't think of looking for him in a Navy housing development, especially in Officers' Country. That's what made his seemingly foolhardy choice ideal.

He crept along the bushes to a rear bedroom and began to carefully cut through the screen. He grinned at how he had cursed the hot dry air brought in by the desert winds all day, but this was the one night when every house window in San Diego would be open. Lowering himself quietly from the window sill, he debated removing his shoes. He was inside now and didn't have to worry much about silence, and it would feel so good to take them off; but his feet were swollen from ten hours of walking and running, so there was a more than even chance they wouldn't fit again later. Better to keep them on.

A board creaked beneath his feet in the hallway, and her head snapped around as he entered the kitchen.

"What are you doing here?" she whispered. "What do you want?"

She rose from the chair, still clutching the slip of paper, then almost absent-mindedly sticking it into the pocket of her robe. She was younger than he had thought, maybe twenty-five, and her green eyes glittered feverishly, the only color in her pale face.

"Just be quiet, lady—no yelling. Don't do anything you'll be sorry for. I need a place to rest for a while. I could use something to eat, too, and some clothes, and maybe I'll borrow

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your car for a couple of days."

He held an open switchblade in his right hand, about waist-high, and motioned her back against the counter with it.

"Just keep quiet and be good, and I won't have to hurt you."

He moved sideways to the table, pulled a chair out with his foot, and sat down facing her. His uniform was sweat-stained and badly wrinkled, and he seemed almost grateful just to find a chair.

"There are some of Bob's clothes in the bedroom. He's a little taller than you, but they should fit all right. The car keys are in my purse. All I have here is about fifteen dollars, but you can take that, too. Take anything you want—just go away and leave me alone, please."

He tried to place the emotion in her voice. It wasn't fear, as he had expected, just a kind of quiet desperation mixed with, maybe, anger. Funny—he had worried so about being confronted with a hysterical woman; this one he couldn't figure.

"Look, lady, I'm sorry if I interrupted your daydreams, but it wasn't my idea to be on the run. I'm hot and tired, and I'm not about to put up here with you any longer than I have to. It's too dangerous. Just fix me something to eat and then we can take care of the clothes."

Defeat showed in the slump of her shoulders as she turned to the refrigerator. She uncovered some leftover roast beef and brought out bread and mustard. She reached unthinkingly toward the knife case hanging on the wall. Suddenly he sprang from his chair, grabbed her wrist, and twisted hard.

"No funny business with knives—I warn you. I know how to use this one and I promise you I will."

The pain in her wrist died to a throb as he released it, and she nodded dumbly that she understood. "I'll use the bread knife, the one with a blunt end, on the left, if you'll hand it to me."

He watched as she tried to slice through the beef with trembling hands. The meat shredded badly under the serrations of the blade, but finally there was enough for a sandwich. She put the knife in the sink, glad to see him relax and sit down again, and began washing lettuce leaves.

"Why are you running away? Are you trying to get home again?"

"I don't have a home to get to, lady. I used to live in Jacksonville, Florida, but I'm strictly on my own now. Let's just say I'm looking out for my best interests in running away."

He reached for the radio on the counter and pulled it closer to him. There should be a news broadcast at 11:00. Maybe it

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would give him a clue as to where the search was being conducted. Music blared and he turned down the volume.

"We were in Jacksonville for one tour," Janet said softly. "We liked it there. Bob always hoped to get back there some day, maybe to retire. Aren't you even going to tell me your name?"

The question caught him off guard and he mumbled "Eddie," almost before he knew it. Then he snapped around, all his attention on the news.

"And now, for a local bulletin: the Shore Patrolman reported earlier as in critical condition has died at Balboa Hospital of the knife wounds inflicted by the escaping prisoner. An All-Points Bulletin has been issued for Lance Corporal Edward Peterson, USMC, nineteen years of age, five foot ten, brown hair, gray eyes, last seen wearing a Marine uniform. Anyone knowing his whereabouts should—"

He snapped off the dial and the sound died, along with the last glimmer of hope in his eyes. He pushed the sandwich away from him, untasted, and reached for the cup in front of her. His face was blank as he sipped the lukewarm chocolate.

"Let me make you some more," she said slowly. "That must be cold by now. It won't take but a few minutes."

"Oh, sure. The Lord knows what you'd put in it, too. You heard that bulletin. I can't afford to take any chances now. I'll keep this cup."

"But, Eddie—"

"Don't 'But Eddie' me! You sound just like my mother when the Shore Patrol picked me up for being AWOL. 'But, Eddie, how could you do this to me.' My God, they were going to send me to Vietnam, but all she could think of was what her friends would say when they found out I ran away. Why did it all happen, anyway—why?"

"I understand, Eddie. It isn't easy going to war, to know you might be killed."

"Oh, sure you understand, lady. Sure you do. Nobody's trying to send *you* over there. Your flyboy husband comes back with a chest full of medals for you to brag about—that's *your* idea of war. Well, I didn't want to go, but nobody cared about what *I* felt. I don't believe in killing people—how's that for a joke, huh? I didn't even mind the thought of going to the brig after they picked me up when I was AWOL, but it was my first offense and they decided to ship me out with the rest of my platoon.

"Two SP's left me in a room while they went out for lunch, before the trip back to Camp Pendleton. I found the knife in a desk drawer. Guess they took

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it off someone else, because it had a little paper tag with a name tied to it. I thought I'd use it on myself, then I could stay here in the hospital. But the SP's came back then and there wasn't time to do anything. When they were putting me in the car I panicked. I stabbed one of them and took off running. But there's no place to run, nobody to run to."

He buried his face in his hands and slumped forward to the table, crying like a child.

"Nobody wants to go to Vietnam, Eddie. My husband didn't want to go back. He felt he had done his share when he was injured there last year. He was in the hospital for three months here and when he was well, they sent him back again. He would understand how you feel. Please try to believe that I do, too."

He raised his head and wiped his eyes on his sleeve. He drank the last swallow of chocolate silently.

"What are you going to do now, Eddie?"

"I got to get away from San Diego, maybe go to some big city in the East where nobody will notice me. Get me some clothes. If anyone spots this uniform, I've had it."

He stumbled after her into the bedroom and watched her take slacks, a sports coat, and a tie from the wall closet. She handed him a small suitcase and asked him to open it while she chose a short-sleeved white shirt and a pair of socks from the bureau. She found an electric razor in the top drawer, one she had given Bob for Christmas, not knowing at the time that he hated to use them. This she handed to Eddie, saying, "You'll have to wear your own shoes. I don't think Bob's will fit you." She turned to watch him as he ran the shaver over his face. "Are you sure this is the best thing to do? Wouldn't it be better if you turned yourself in?"

"Look, lady. They wanted me bad enough ten hours ago. That guy is dead now, and you can bet they want me ten times as bad. Hand me those clothes."

She folded clean underwear and two shirts in the suitcase while he fumbled with buttons. He seemed so tired, hardly able to make his fingers function. He zipped the slacks and began to knot his tie. He rubbed his eyes and leaned against the wall, then jerked upright, fighting dizziness. Something was wrong—he wanted to sleep or cry, or do anything but keep moving.

In sudden panic he lunged for the knife on top of the bureau. The suitcase flew out of Janet's hands with good aim, and the knife skittered across the floor under the bed. She pulled a small automatic from the nightstand, slipping off the safety as she brought it up in front of her

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He stood across the room, staring in disbelief, his face slack.

"What did you do to me?" he whispered.

"Eddie, you can't help yourself now and as you said, there's no one left—only me. Let me help you, Eddie—please."

"Damn you, I thought you *were* trying to help me! I ought to kill you, too."

He couldn't focus on her as tears blinded his eyes. He tried to take a step, but stumbled against the bed. His hand grasped the bedspread, pulling it down to the floor with him.

"Damn you, damn you—"

He lay there, hardly moving.

Janet ran past him into the living room and dialed the Base Security Police number. "This is Mrs. Mason. Send an ambulance to 7346 Oleander Drive right away. There's a boy here by the name of Eddie Peterson, and he needs a doctor."

"Eddie Peterson? My God, lady. Just hold on tight. We'll be there right away."

She waited in a chair near the bedroom door, watching over the boy until she heard a siren splitting the silence of the sleeping neighborhood. Two Shore Patrolmen and an officer were outside the door when she opened it.

"I said to bring an ambulance! He's here, but he needs a doctor badly." She thrust the gun into the hands of the startled officer and pointed the way to the bedroom.

"Is he shot bad?" asked the officer, pushing his way in beside his men.

"He isn't shot at all, sir. He's just sleeping."

"Well, Mrs. Mason," said the officer grinning at her, "what did you hit him with?"

"Oh, please! Get him a doctor. He drank some hot chocolate with more than ten sleeping capsules dissolved in it. He might die."

"Okay, take it easy. An ambulance is on the way right now. We were in the neighborhood because of the search for him and got here first. I know it's been an ordeal for you, and maybe the doctor can give you something for your nerves when he gets here. Tell me something, though. How did you manage to dope the hot chocolate right under his nose without his getting suspicious?"

"But it wasn't for him. I tried to talk him out of drinking it, offered to make him some more, but he wouldn't trust me. You see, I was planning to drink it myself."

She pulled a crumpled telegram from the pocket of her robe and handed it to the officer.

"My husband, Bob, was killed two days ago when his plane was shot down in Vietnam. It's like I told the boy—" she began to sob—"he didn't want to go, either."

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SKYJACK

by WILLIAM PATRICK MORAN, JR.

GOOD GOD, IT'S BEEN EASY, unbelievably easy," he thought as the plane banked and the coastline curled into view ahead. One would think that after all the skyjacks, after all the publicity of the past year, they would at least learn to lock the door to the cockpit!

"Oh, well," he mentally shrugged, keeping the muzzle of the pistol rock-steady on the pilot's neck, "I guess pilots are no different from anyone else—the old 'it can't happen to me' philosophy." Still, he couldn't help thinking it should have been more difficult.

"It seems like you pilots are pretty well used to this," he said aloud, shocked by the volume and timbre of his own voice.

"Our instructions are very clear. They cover every eventuality, even this one," the Second Officer said, his voice tight.

The pilot, conscious of the hard cold steel at his neck, moved his hand slowly and deliberately to adjust the microphone at his throat. "Roger, Control. Landing gear locked-down, flaps down. Airspeed one hundred and eighty knots."

"Roger, Control. Touchdown in two minutes. Seven seven four out."

The skyjacker watched as a casual observer might, his turmoil evidenced only by the white knuckles that grasped the gun. "Two minutes," he thought, and his heart leaped. "Two minutes and the nightmare of worry and uncertainty will be over." Two minutes and the wild dream of a college kid would have come true. No more worrying about grades, no more currying favor with professors whose only goal was to become senior professors, who expounded the theory and practice of Political Science and International Relations according to the precepts of the current administration.

Hard line—soft line—when would people realize that there is only *one line* that can lead to the fulfillment of man's destiny?

Even as he felt the thump of the landing gear hitting the earth, bouncing, hitting again and then rolling smoothly, he remembered the thump—hard like a fist hitting the pit of his stomach—as Professor Rubin opened his first lec-

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ture in the Theory of Government with quotations from *Das Kapital, Mein Kampf,* and the *Declaration of Independence.*

"It's all right there," cried an inner voice, "right there in black and white. All the reasons why *we* can't lose and *they* can't win. Why all the Panmunjoms, Summit Conferences, and Paris Peace Talks? Why can't they understand that we *will* win eventually?"

He staggered with a sudden jolt, almost losing his balance and with it his precious hold on a new life, as the pilot hit the reverse throttle and the giant turbojets began the enormous task of deceleration. It was as though he could feel Anna's hands once more on his shoulders, pushing him back, begging him not to leave, begging him not to try this foolish means to his end.

"Anna, Anna," his heart cried, "you should be here with me—here to enjoy the freedom that will be mine in only a few hundred more yards."

Already he could see the curious faces of the crowd, carefully restrained by the police. He could see others—the officials—in a tight little cluster, removed from the common masses by something more than the aura of officialdom. These, he knew, were the men with whom he felt a bond of idealism, of political philosophy. These, he knew, were the men whose questions he would soon be answering, as he had answered Professor Rubin's questions on so many nights over so many cups of tasteless coffee.

His mind cried out that he must prove himself worthy of their admiration for his effort. They must be made to realize that his action was not that of a criminal, with a reason to hide from his peers, or that of an immature schoolboy searching for a goal, but not sure of the nature of the goal.

"They will understand," he reassured himself; "otherwise they would not be in the responsible positions they are in."

As the plane slowed, he could see individual faces in the crowd of men he would soon face—smooth civilians, well dressed, apparently bored by the whole affair; burly, uniformed policemen, hiding behind sunglasses, showing their frank interest in the business by animated conversation.

The sudden diminuendo of the engines snapped him to attention, all thoughts of the future forgotten in the immediacy of the present. His voice was steady as he ordered the crew to remain in their seats. At his command the pilot opened the private hatch from the cockpit to the ground. He stepped back carefully as the pilot disconnected the radio, unbuckled the straps that bound him into the plane commander's chair, and slowly stood up.

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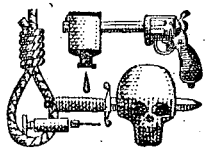
He returned the muzzle of the pistol to exactly the same position outlined in white against the pink of the pilot's neck. He paused at the door only long enough to fill his lungs with the tropical air, sweet as his newfound freedom. Then he, Miguel Jimeno Diego Juarez, quickly followed Commander Vassily Stephanovich Gruzinski (pilot, Aeroflot Airlines Flight 774, Moscow-to-Havana) down the ladder into the warmth of the Miami morning.

EDITORS' NOTE: Two days after we decided to purchase Lieutenant and Mrs. Moran's "first stories"—to be exact, on Sunday, March 23, 1969—we heard comedian Jack Carter tell a joke on the Ed Sullivan TV Show based on the main point of Lieutenant Moran's story. Perhaps by now Jack Carter's "gag" use of this point has been widely repeated; but at the time, even if the joke was destined to become well-known, we did not think it fair to penalize Lieutenant Moran because of the unavoidable time lapse between the purchase and the publication of his story.



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McQuade, captain of detectives, was a big man in his own precinct. Everybody knew him—the merchants, cabbies, barflies, policy runners, waiters, crooks, clergymen—and that was McQuade's trouble. His popularity had fattened his pride and flattened his pocketbook . . .

Another of William Fay's human-interest cop stories, with a heart as big as a big-city precinct . . .

BRIBE

by WILLIAM FAY

IT OCCURRED TO MCQUADE, THE captain of detectives, that there had never been a time in his life when he could less afford to be shot by a crook or hit by a truck; and yet, paradoxically, from a purely selfish point of view, he could not imagine a time when it would be more convenient.

"Joe?" his wife called from downstairs. "Are you up?"

"M'm'm," he said.

His voice failed to carry the width of his pillow, but McQuade was awake. He was a big man, three months younger than fifty years, and he was tired. If he always slept the sleep of the just, it was only rarely, in recent weeks, that he had known the rest of the fiscally sound.

It was a regular thing now for McQuade to awaken to that arithmetic so familiar to the loving but insolvent fathers of large families. Always, at first arising, this obligation to pay for things he could not afford seemed more insurmountable than any departmental problem he might have to face as a cop.

With the first strong cup of coffee, he knew, it was usual for some of these doubts to shrink, if not disappear. And as the day advanced, so would the hope and strength advance in Joseph McQuade, who believed in the Lord's great providence. Even so, as he had learned, the mornings could be bad. He got up and went into the bathroom.

"Do you hear me, Joe?" his wife called now. He knew she was up from her chair, as she ought not to have been, and there was a grain of irritation in her voice. "Are you still in bed?"

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"It's either me or a burglar that's using the toothpaste!" McQuade called down to her. "Just wait'll I check!"

I'm a real witty fellow, he decided, more in ridicule than praise. McQuade was a little weary both of himself and the rose-tinged good intentions he was so chronically unable to fulfill. Everyone said he had proved himself such a bright cop by his effective handling of Otto (Bitsy) Lamb, the bookmaking man he had driven to the point of distraction. Well, if he was so smart as a cop, McQuade concluded, it must be that he handled his private life with a separate and deficient set of brains. All the talk downtown about making him a deputy inspector wouldn't pay a leather nickel on the gas bill at this time. *Where,* he wondered, *can I raise three hundred and fifty dollars today?*

It was Tuesday and the house was almost sinisterly quiet as McQuade descended the stairs. The reason, of course, was that the children had left for school—at least the four of them still living home, since Joan, the oldest, was a senior at the Mount Mark College for Women, in New Jersey.

Nor was "children" precisely the word to describe the size of the remaining four. Other mornings, when McQuade rose earlier, the weight of them, moving with three-steps-at-a-time velocity on the stairs, made the small house tremble like a tambourine.

"Good morning," Mary said.

He walked over and kissed her, attempting no bright remarks because of late she had displayed very little appreciation of his humor. "I'm glad you're sitting down," McQuade said softly. "How do you feel?"

"I'm all right, thank you; I'm well enough." She sat in the center of the room, in the prettily pinkish, wing-backed chair. She had a footstool too; not to cover the section of carpet the cat had shredded and torn, but, quite logically, to rest her feet.

Mary sat there looking handsome and correct and like a stranger in the house. Handsomeness was not a new note, but the selfconscious correctness was, and she seemed less like a woman who had been sick than she resembled in certain, rather frightening ways a new person emerging from the old. "What time are you going to the office?" Mary asked.

"I took the day off."

"Oh?" she said. "Well, isn't that nice?" And the way Mary said it, steepling her fingers with exaggerated daintiness, looking quickly one way, then the other, but with her multiplying and unspoken thoughts turned inward, he knew she suspected him of something. "Isn't it strange you had to work the day I came home

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from the hospital?" she asked. "Yet today you're as free as a lark?"

McQuade's heart tightened in his chest. It was only recently that Mary had begun to say these things, or, more dangerously, to search for reasons to say such things. She saw the look on his face and he supposed she was already sorry. *God help us,* he thought, *why do people who love each other have to go through spells like this?*

"Would you like a cup of coffee?" he asked.

"I'm not used to being Lady Astor in the queen's chair," Mary said, "but if you don't mind."

McQuade walked into the kitchen and put a light under the pot on the stove. From where he stood, holding the evaporated milk in his hand, he could still see her sitting in the pinkish, wing-backed chair—oddly motionless, for Mary. *She's scared and worried about expenses, and I haven't helped her much,* he thought. He had, of course, heard many unscientific descriptions of how the middle years impose dramatic changes in a woman's life. But the doctor had said that Mary was fine and that her operation was nowadays routine. She was tired, the doctor had reminded him, as if McQuade, knowing her household duties, could not have figured that one out. Why wouldn't she be tired?

Now he poured the coffee. It was half-past nine by the kitchen clock. The mailman had come and gone, and today, at least, he had not been afraid of the mail. The letter from Mount Mark College, demanding the money, had arrived the day before. McQuade attempted to be jolly.

"Two coffees comin' up!" he announced.

He carried the two cups in the span of one hand, like a professional waiter. Mary didn't seem to notice. "Martin Reidy was here this morning" she said.

"Oh yes?" McQuade took a cautious sip from his cup. Then he said, too slyly, "I wouldn't have missed Martin for the world."

"Well, there's a lot you could learn from Martin Reidy."

"I know." He didn't want to be provoking, yet here he was, as countless times before, letting his big mouth do the work of his head. "I'd have saved a hundred thousand box tops by this time," he said. "I'd know how to cut my own hair. I'd save sugar and string and I'd have money in the bank, if I were more like Martin."

"Aren't you the smart one, though?" said Mary. "Aren't you clever, dear? Well, the trouble with you is that you're jealous of Martin Reidy. And let me tell you something else."

Which was better, he decided

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It left her invalid's languor less intact. Her automatic defense of Martin Reidy was a familiar reflex and, for that reason, reassuring. Martin Reidy, an old admirer of Mary's, was also a captain of police, whose specialty was traffic. "Old Carbon Monoxide," McQuade liked to call him, not in disparagement of traffic men, but to enliven things at home; or, if the subject was economics, "Old Safe-Deposit Pants." Mary had thought it was fun, when the joke was new, because even the children knew that back in the '20's and early '30's she used to go dancing with the dapper, graceful traffic man.

"Go ahead and enjoy yourself," she challenged him now. "Remind me that Martin saves his money. Hah! Hah! Hah! Such humor gives me cramps. At least he never lent four hundred dollars to a petty thief like Freddie Lomax—did he?"

"Mary, please. Let's try to be fair. Don't rub it in."

"Well, did he? Would he? Was lending money to Freddie Lomax being fair to yourself or your family? Didn't you know that some day there might be an emergency? Do you call that fair?"

"I suppose not," said McQuade.

Freddie Lomax was, as Mary had said, a minor thief, but he was also, as McQuade could testify, an amoral ingrate and a bum. Now that the $400 was Exhibit A in any family discussion of this kind, it would be hard for McQuade to explain what tidal wave of blessed charity had washed him clear of his wits on that occasion.

Freddie's claim on a policeman's generosity was that he needed money to straighten his affairs before he could take the honest job, outside New York, that McQuade had secured for him. He didn't run with major thieves like Otto Lamb, but his companions were not choice. McQuade, of course, had liked him. Freddie's smile could melt a nightstick. He had style. Watching the bum play pool one day, McQuade had that same impression of coordinated class he used to get from watching Joe DiMaggio swing a bat.

"Well?" Mary said.

"I didn't say a word."

Freddie Lomax, as McQuade had every reason to recall, had at that time just done 90 days as an accomplice to the sale of a stolen car—whether willingly or unwillingly, a man had to judge for himself. It was—at least on the books—a first offense, and it was not, as Martin Reidy had declared, a miracle for McQuade to have $400 to lend.

The truth was that he had just converted his GI insurance from one category to another and had,

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for McQuade, a considerable amount. As for the $400 he was to have got $50 of it back each month in regular installments mailed to him by Freddie's new employer. It might have worked if Freddie hadn't been fired from the job in exactly two weeks.

"So go ahead and laugh," McQuade's wife said.

He didn't laugh. Jokes about money wouldn't hold together. He was grateful to all the saints in heaven that Mary, already burdened, was not aware that the last quarter installment of Joan's board and tuition at Mount Mark College hadn't been paid. The letter from the registrar, though upstairs in his jacket, was like a mustard plaster clinging to his conscience:

Dear Mr. McQuade: We regret the necessity of reminding you once more that Joan's account still shows an unpaid balance of $354.25. It is inflexible policy at Mount Mark not to admit to final examinations students whose accounts are in arrears. We hope that by return mail you will relieve this office from the responsibility of so informing your daughter. Examinations are scheduled to begin May 17th.

Very truly yours,
FLORENCE C. WYLIE, Registrar

"Martin left some tickets," Mary said.

He was thinking that today was the 15th of May, leaving him barely time to get the money in the mail. He hardly dared go to the bank where he already had a loan, but there was always the Self-Reliant Finance Company. *Ah, the Self-Reliant,* thought McQuade. *Here I am, earning a captain's pay, and if I had the self-reliance of a squirrel in the park, I wouldn't be in a mess like this.* Mary, he realized, was watching him.

"You say he left some tickets, Mary? For what—that traffic exhibit at the armory?"

"I guess that's what he meant. I didn't examine them. He wondered if you couldn't sell a few dozen for the traffic division, and I said—well, I would remind you."

This time she smiled at the implicit joke, so that McQuade, in gratitude, knelt down in front of her, gently dislodging her feet from the footstool. He put his head in her lap and his arms around her, and it seemed so much, much better this way, even though she didn't speak.

"Now who would I sell his tickets to?" McQuade said, looking up, and hoping to broaden the joke. "To myself? Or to the cab drivers he's persecuted now for twenty years?"

"Please, Joe," she said, "lay off poor Martin."

But she laughed. One of her

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hands stroked and ruffled his hair. He tightened his arms around her, and he couldn't say the things he wished to say. *God make her well and give her back to us the way she used to be,* he prayed. *Please, God, don't let her lose her faith in me.*

McQuade walked from his own house to Pelham Parkway, passing the equally modest but more meticulously maintained Bronx residence of Mr. and Mrs. Martin Reidy and their daughter, Agnes Mae. The Reidys owned the community's one magnolia tree, which had bloomed and shed its glory many days before. McQuade took note, in passing, that there were no stray blossoms on the lawn.

He took the west-bound bus that passed the Bronx Zoo first and then the campus of Fordham University. He could see the great trees, higher than the Gothic granite of the buildings. It was a little late to realize that Joan might have been educated at some local college that her father could afford.

McQuade was a big man in his own precinct. He knew that much. It had fattened his pride and, very likely, looking back, it had helped to flatten his pockets, too, because his big-shot complex hadn't been discouraged here. On Fordham Road, that platinum-precious tract of uptown real estate, the merchants, cabbies, barflies, policy runners, waiters, crooks, and clergymen all knew McQuade. The girls in the booths outside the movie houses, selling tickets for the first pre-noon performances, knew him and called his name. A man on a garbage truck waved cordially; the unhappy driver of a laundry truck, fixing a flat tire, said to him, "You've got the racket, Joe."

It was a little embarrassing to be this well known when you were hoping to slip unseen through a door, then upstairs to the Self-Reliant Finance Company. McQuade, watched by too many people, wavered, then walked on.

At Fordham Road's intersection with the Grand Concourse a few of Otto (Bitsy) Lamb's boys, lean and hungry and frustrated by McQuade's unending vigilance, watched his approach, but did not linger long. An unadorned sedan, driven by a plain-clothes cop, stopped at the curb. A detective named Harry Matson was sitting next to the driver. McQuade walked over.

"A nice way to spend your day off," Matson said. "Your wife put you out?"

"With the cat and the old milk bottles," said McQuade. He stood there with Matson, a veteran cop, watching Otto Lamb's boys stroll away, so dainty and so gingerly, like chippies dancing on a skinny piece of string.

"Boy, would they like to get

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rid of you," said Matson. "Were you gonna give them hell?"

"Not today Harry, no. I think they've had it, anyhow."

The truth was that McQuade's own precinct had, within the limits of existing law, been purified. He wouldn't pretend to himself or his superiors that among a hundred thousand concentrated souls nobody ever raised a phone to place a two-dollar bet. All he could guarantee was that the phone call wasn't accommodated in any of the myriad cigar shops, pool-rooms, barber shops, shoeshine stands, or regulation horse rooms once controlled by Otto Lamb.

McQuade had always believed, and with the opportunity had proved, that given enough cops, brains, diligence, and dollar honesty, a precinct could be clean. This morning, however, he had begun to wonder if this dollar honesty, for which he was so willing to take a bow, was not a cheapened virtue in a man who did not possess what he could describe only as "dollar responsibility." *Who am I to criticize Martin Reidy?*

He turned to Harry Matson. "By the way, you ever see Freddie Lomax around?"

Matson laughed. "Your old friend, Captain? We see him once in a while, but not too often. He wears nice clothes and spends a lot of time downtown."

"Has he got a job?"

"Hah!" Matson said. "Has Freddie got a job? Look, Captain, no offense meant, but has Gina Lollobrigida got a tattoo on her nose?"

"I see what you mean."

"You want the bum picked up?"

"I don't want a sloppy vagrancy charge that might embarrass the department." McQuade said. "But I'd like to see him."

You went up one flight from the street–to the Self-Reliant Finance Company, Mr. Aaron Cricketsen, Mgr. You couldn't wait all day in the street like a loft thief for the eyes of the world to turn away. Besides, people might think he was going upstairs to visit the dentist or chiropodist who shared the floor with Self-Reliant. *The hell they would.* Even so, he climbed the stairs.

"Captain McQuade? Will you take Booth Four? Mr. Cricketsen will be right with you."

The young lady's name was Miss Pantages. All McQuade knew about her was that her voice, calling his name, would have carried over an alp. He followed her. Her high hips swiveled within a light print dress. She wore paper cuffs and had a pencil in her hair.

McQuade was grateful when the door of the booth closed behind him. He was staring at

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a magazine in a plastic cover when Mr. Cricketsen, the manager, came in.

"It's so nice seeing you again, Captain."

"Yeah, lucky me," McQuade said.

"What was that, Captain?"

"I'd like to borrow three hundred and fifty dollars."

"Of course." Mr. Cricketsen was a thin, rather engaging man, as blond as cornsilk, with the eyes of a dishonest woman. He placed an application form on the desk. He had a series of cards to which he thoughtfully referred. "Captain," he said, "do you have any other ourstanding loans?"

"The Bronx Independent Bank and Trust," McQuade admitted. "Five hundred dollars. I pay them forty-four-something a month."

"M'm'm. I see. Well, that's not insurmountable. You have a house, of course? It's in your name?"

"Mine and my wife's," McQuade said.

"And Mrs. McQuade is willing to sign this note?"

"I wouldn't want that," McQuade said quickly. "I'd like it to be like the last time, if you don't mind. I signed the papers all by myself. You gave me the money, I paid you back. I'm civil service. I've got a steadier job than the mayor." McQuade managed to smile. Mr. Cricketsen did not.

"You see, Captain," Mr. Cricketsen said, "the last time you were here you only wanted two hundred dollars." He looked again at his reference cards. "You paid it back very nicely, but you didn't have any other outstanding loan. This isn't personal, Captain. It's company regulations. Your house is mortgaged?"

"Twice," said McQuade. "One big one, one little one."

"I'm afraid then, Captain, that this loan, in these circumstances, would require another signature."

"Oh," said McQuade.

"Any friend or relative who is steadily employed."

"I know what you mean." McQuade sat looking at his big hands. There was Mary's brother, Al—a real good-natured soul whose wife, a thrifty woman, would likely shoot him dead if he put his signature on someone else's loan. Which wouldn't be fair to Al. McQuade stood up.

"If you don't mind," he said. "I'll try the Bronx Independent; see if they'll increase the loan I've got."

"Naturally, Captain. But please feel free to come back here—on the terms I've outlined, of course."

McQuade departed Booth No. 4, gazing neither left nor right in his determination to descend the stairs unnoticed and unseen.

"Goodbye, Captain McQuade!" Miss Pantages called after him.

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He kept going, wishing deep in his heart he had the courage to stop and choke her to death.

He had lunch in a cafeteria on Fordham Road. He had a liverwurst sandwich, a cup of coffee, and a humbling meditation on the numbing vice of pride. Before coming to lunch he had gone once into the great rotunda of the Bronx Independent Bank and Trust, then quietly retreated because he saw too many of his friends. *You were scared,* he accused himself; *you were like a shill with dirty pictures when he walks into a cop.*

One difficulty at the Bronx Independent was the location of the personal-loan department. It was up front, isolated, labeled with a large sign; once you stepped inside the velvet rope there was no use pretending you came in to change a twenty-dollar bill. *But why be ashamed? Was I looking to steal the money?* He got up and left the cafeteria. It was almost half-past two.

This time he walked into the Bronx Independent like a man with a mission, and he did not permit himself to gape self-consciously around.

"Yes, sir?" The middle-aged woman behind the velvet rope did not look like Miss Pantages. "Can I assist you?"

"I'd like to see someone about a loan."

"Is this a new account?"

"No, ma'am; it's about increasing a loan I have. Mr. Grissom is the man I saw before. He's over there, the third desk."

"Would you like to fill out this application and then come back to see Mr. Grissom the first thing in the morning?"

"I meant today. It's important." The woman's interested, sympathetic attention encouraged him to say, "This is my day off. Besides, it almost has to be today."

"What a shame, then, because there's nothing I can do. Mr. Grissom has more people waiting for him than he can possibly see. We close at three o'clock. Won't you take this application?"

"Thank you," McQuade said wearily.

He walked away from the velvet rope, lit a cigarette, then flipped the dead match into a sanded receptacle. The more he looked at the tall man standing at the Christmas Club window, the more this watchful figure resembled his neighbor, Martin Reidy.

"Joey" the traffic man said, "How is Joey?"

"I'm dandy, Martin. I just came in to dump some stocks. You know—capital gains? It's really the only way to get ahead."

"Easy come, huh, Joey? Easy go?" McQuade was, of course, aware that Reidy had

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been watching him, but it didn't seem to matter any more. Reidy, although a captain of a uniformed squad, sometimes indulged the option of his rank and wore civilian clothes. He looked as graceful and trim and uncluttered as the lawn outside his house. He put his bank book back in his inside pocket, then patted it to flatness, thus assuring against interference with the drape of his well-made coat. "No luck at all?" he asked McQuade.

"What do you mean 'no luck'?"

"I saw you coming downstairs from the Self-Reliant," Reidy said. "You know, it's not how much money a man makes, Joey; it's what he puts aside that counts."

"I see what you mean. I'll remember that."

They walked out of the bank together. McQuade tried to be nice. He had no desire to maintain that his own way of living was exemplary or his prudent neighbor's wrong. He had certainly learned otherwise today. It was simply that, beginning with Mary's sermon in the morning, he'd had a very large portion of Martin Reidy.

"I remember I warned you years ago," Martin said, "when you bought that fool television set with the six-inch screen. One year later they were selling them twice the size for half the price. And another thing, Joey."

"Look, Martin," McQuade said on a rising note. "Lay off. Leave me alone. I'm a cop with a problem that I took a day off to handle. You're a cop with a job to do. Go count the dimes in a parkin' meter. Go paint a white line."

"Very funny," Martin Reidy said, but he was not amused. "The fact is that a cop as broke as you, day off or no day off, can't keep his mind on his job. There've been cases like yours before, an' don't think the Commissioner liked it. Remember that, Joey, when you're thinking of that nice Inspector's badge you want so bad."

The moment hung, unpleasant and unresolved, as Martin Reidy walked away. The mixed elements of truth and bitter prophecy in Reidy's words were starkly real. McQuade stood there in futile rage and with a sense of creeping shame. How widely had he advertised his poverty today?

The reason you're broke is that you want to be a big shot all the time, he realized. *You've had a steady job for twenty-five years, but you're a payday sport who likes to ride in cabs. You like to say: "This round's on me." Don't pity yourself.*

He was thinking how he ought to stop this nonsense and give his nerves a chance to unwind. The unsolved problem still remained:

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Joan's unpaid board and tuition bill. The only thing left was to go see Mary's brother, Al; then go home and confess to Mary that he was a pride-swollen clown who from now on would try to live within his means. If Al agreed to cosign his note with Self-Reliant, McQuade decided, it would still be possible to phone the registrar at Mount College and explain that the money was in the mail. He was thinking these things when an off-again-on-again drunk named Augie Weiss came up to him.

"You got a minute, Joe?"

"I'm not going to run away," he said.

"You been lookin' for Freddie Lomax, I hear." Augie was sober today.

"Who told you that?"

"I saw Harry Matson. He said you might be interested."

"Where is he?"

"Well, maybe half an hour ago, when I saw Freddie, he was parkin' his car in the Jefferson Garage."

"He was parking his what?"

"His car, I said. Freddie's got one of those new what-chamacallits—a two-tone job. He asked me did I want to have a few drinks over at Ferguson's. I said, 'No, I'm on the wagon.' Then I seen you here and I remembered what Harry Matson said."

Always, in the future, McQuade was willing to admit that Martin Reidy had been right. A cop too tightly bound in by his own affairs can't give the right attention to the details of his job. Always he was willing to admit that when he stepped down into the rathskeller coolness of Ferguson's saloon, his head was full of everything but the obvious signs a cop of his experience should have recognized.

The bland look on the face of the stranger, for instance, who stood outside of Ferguson's, leaning against the building with the luxurious disinterest of someone who really belonged; or the man behind the bar, holding a goblet in his hands, turning it with unnecessary diligence in the lint-shedding fold of a ragged towel. A radio was tuned to a ball game as McQuade came in and looked around. The small rectangular space, including a phone booth, a pinball game, a jukebox, and a dozen small tables, was apparently free of customers. The bartender turned the radio off.

"Yes, sir?"

"I'll have a beer." McQuade watched the big man hit the tap with the butt of his hand. "I was looking for Freddie Lomax."

"I don't know any Lomax."

McQuade heard the soft footsteps before he heard the voice that said, "You won't find Freddie Lomax here."

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A chill that didn't come from the beer passed through him. He knew the voice. He had already turned and was facing Otto (Bitsy) Lamb. *Here it is* he thought; *this is what I walked into.*

"You shouldn't believe all you hear from Augie Weiss, Joe."

"Why shouldn't I?"

Otto Lamb did not in any way fulfill the cuteness or the lack of size the "Bitsy" part of his locally celebrated name suggested. He was a well-constructed man of McQuade's own age. He looked like any kind of person you might meet—until you look at him long enough and the wrong notes began to play. His smile wasn't right; if he scrubbed it and rehearsed it for a day and a half it still would not be clean.

"Some days you can't make a dollar, can you, Joe?"

"It gets rough," McQuade conceded—"sometimes, that is." He tried to keep a lid on the accumulation of his rage. He walked among the tables aimlessly. He sat down and began to drum on the top of one. "So my line's a little slow," McQuade said. "How is yours?"

Otto Lamb turned on the same smile like a dirty bulb. "You haven't helped it any," he said. "Not even a little, Joe."

"Why should I?"

"You're a family man, McQuade, but you can't even afford to drop dead. Your wife wouldn't have the pennies to put on your eyelids." Otto Lamb sat down. "You're all over the neighborhood, with your hand out, like a Little Sister o' the Poor."

The insolence cut like a knife. "I could punch you right in your smart mouth," said McQuade.

"You won't. It wouldn't pay. Look on the table, Joe. This pays. Ten thousand dollars. It's yours."

The bills were as fresh and crisp as a new deck of cards. They were strangely beautiful to a poor man's eyes. *He thinks I'm a mutt, and maybe I am, to be sitting in the room with him.* He watched Otto's quick hands fan through the money. All the engravings were of Benjamin Franklin.

"How do I know someone won't walk in, Otto?"

"Nobody will. We got a man outside. There's a sign on the door that says, 'Be back in twenty minutes.' Henry here, behind the bar, you don't have to worry about. The money's yours."

"Count it," said McQuade. His mouth was dry.

"It's all there, Joe."

"I'd like it counted, anyhow."

Henry had drawn himself a beer and walked around from in back of the bar. He turned on the radio, this time to music. Henry rubbed his hands on his apron, watching the front door.

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"Twenty-one hundred, twenty-two hundred," said Otto Lamb. He glanced uneasily at McQuade. "Look. What have I got to keep on countin' it for?"

McQuade reached out and took the money, as though content. He wrapped it in a handkerchief and put it in his pocket. He could feel it there, against his leg, as thick as a folded hand.

"I like the nice clear fingerprints in the corners," said McQuade. "Prints on money are sketchy evidence, but it helps. Come on now, Otto—you and Henry and that watchdog in the street."

The memory of Otto Lamb's face wouldn't be a wholesome thing for a family man to bring home. Otto swore obscenely. McQuade reached over the table and grabbed him by the eight-dollar shirt.

"You don't have a witness!" Otto screamed. "Let go o' me! I'll swear you propositioned me!"

McQuade drew Otto close to him with one hand, slapped him with the other. He forced him erect and clear of the table. "We've got Henry. We'll make him talk like a phonograph—the high-fidelity kind." The rage in him, so long contained, poured free. "You lousy, dollar-drippin' vulture," he said. "You thought you could buy my soul?"

He was still holding Otto; he was moving toward Henry and reaching for his gun when Otto kneed him in the groin. McQuade fell to his knees, the strength nearly gone from him. He was clinging to a strip of Otto's shirt as the man from outside, summoned by the roaring radio, came down the five steps into Ferguson's, a gun in his hand.

McQuade fired then and the man fell forward, rolling on the floor; the gun had fallen free from his grasp.

"Lower the radio," said McQuade, and Henry, his swift glance going from Otto Lamb to the sweating cop, did the well-considered, conservative thing: he lowered the radio. McQuade, with his pain diminishing, picked up the other gun.

"You first, Otto," he directed. "Henry, get in line."

They ascended to the street. There were people on the sidewalk, timid at first, then crowding near. A young traffic cop came running from the corner—one of Martin Reidy's men.

"There's a guy inside," McQuade said. "He'll need a doctor. He's shot in the leg. And while you're there, son—I haven't got change of a century note—would you steal me a glass of beer?"

The young cop looked at him strangely. "Yes, sir." They could hear a radio car coming fast and loud, maneuvering through the halted traffic in the street. It was a big day in the Bronx.

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A uniformed sergeant drove McQuade home. A stick-ball game still prospered in the street, although the late daylight by now was nearly gone. A half moon, lemon pale, was climbing above the modest homes. McQuade, a troubled hero, had not had the opportunity to get in touch with Mary's brother, Al. He carrried with him at the end of the day the same forebodings to which he had awakened.

"Well," Mary said, "the pride of the department." She wasn't sitting in the pinkish, wing-backed chair. She had been standing in the foyer, waiting. She seemed much taller in her high-heeled shoes and she clung to him with greater strength than McQuade had believed she possessed. "You could have been shot," she said.

"That happens too," he admitted, "but we did all right. The bartender talked in the station house and the case is as tight as Martin Reidy. It'll be the first time Otto's been in jail in over twenty years."

"Now don't you pick on Martin," Mary said.

His spirit sagged. He sighed in final defeat. He walked into the living room and sat down on the sofa. Mary, strolling after him, looked a bit too coy for him to find this particular moment comfortable.

"Martin was here," she said quietly.

And McQuade groaned deep inside. "Again?"

"He said he was sorry about some things he said to you this afternoon, dear."

McQuade raised a cautioning hand.

"Forget it," he said.

"You didn't tell me how badly you needed money, did you, Joe? But Martin said, all things considered, he'd be willing to sign a note for you with the Self-Reliant Finance Company."

McQuade, a stunned man, sat and stared. "Martin Reidy? He said that?"

"Well, of course, he did. I'll admit he trembled when he said it, Joe, but Martin admires you very much. He feels that any man in your position, who can turn down ten thousand dollars, is a good enough risk for him."

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH
recommended by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Salve tibi! Having now occupied this rostrum for a full year, your mentor feels impelled to utter a few thoughts it has inspired. Before assuming these robes I had sometimes regarded critics as a sour, dyspeptic race apart. And yet here I am one of them, frequently griping away like the worst.

A year ago I discussed reviewing with the editor-in-chief of this magazine.

"Every column," the editor suggested, "might be a little sermon on mysteries or mystery writing. And you needn't confine yourself to the current crop. When nothing new seems praiseworthy, feel free to talk about some masterpiece of the past."

"Excellent!" said I, sounding rather like John H. Watson. "If the going gets really rough, there's always *The Moonstone* or *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*."

I was far from serious in this pronouncement; the editor did not call it elementary. But what we considered a fairly remote prospect in sober truth came to pass. Last month, desperate, I found myself reviewing both those works in the same issue.

My critical brethren usually wind up December by selecting what they are pleased to call the year's ten best. This department, with sound reason, must refrain from any choices arbitrarily so stamped. I can't be sure publishers have sent me even half the good new mysteries, though virtually certain I have been stuck with all the bad ones.

On the other hand, never think that Rhadamanthus has spent the whole year in a torture chamber. As here already noted, there have been admirable examples of the mystery-adventure and the spy thriller. Mystery-adventures and spy thrillers need display neither that dazzling ingenuity nor that strict fair play which characterize fine detective fiction, although your outstanding item in each category, as with Stanley Ellin's *The Valentine Estate* or Richard Meade's *The Danube Runs Red,* may be both highly ingenious and strictly fair.

But what of my *beau idéal* and ewe lamb, the Honest Injun detective novel with full-scale evidence and loaded ending? In that field more than a few established craftsmen—Ellery Queen, Michael Innes, Judson Philips, Ed McBain, Robert L. Fish, Robert Van Gulik—have upheld

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their reputations well. Even so, this is not quite what you were promised.

Two months ago I said that at the year's end I should be able to cite four brilliant new detective writers who, if not all tyros in the strictest sense, were at least comparative beginners at their craft. And that promise I am proud to keep. A little reflection in fact, can provide five names instead of four. Each has mastered good English. Though one or two have flirted with espionage, each employs Honest Injun technique. You should be safe with anything they write.

High honors, then, for Emma Lathen *(Come to Dust),* for Patricia Moyes *(Death and the Dutch Uncle)*, for Dorothy Dunnett (The *Photogenic Soprano),* for Eilis Dillon *(Sent to His Account),* for Mildred Davis (*The Third Half*). Did I say five? No, damme! Let's make it half a dozen.

As the only book not hitherto assessed, try *If the Shroud Fits,* by Paul Kruger *(Simon & Schuster,* $4.95). Follow a bloodstained track of ingenuity that twists through life high to low, with its vicious multiple murderer always one dodge ahead until young Lawyer Kramer interprets the clues. And to the company of the above five practioners admit Paul Kruger.

Patricia Moyes, Dorothy Dunnett, Eilis Dillon, Emma Lathen, Mildred Davis, Paul Kruger: two British, one Irish, three American. With the apparent exception of the last-named, they are all women. But the exception is apparent rather than real. My secret agents have learned that 'Mr.' Kruger also buttons 'his' coat on the left-hand side: a disclosure made with full permission of the author and her publisher.

Do I seem to be saying that, among new mystery mongers who play fair, only the ladies can be gentlemen? Oh, no. We could just as well honor the team of Maj Stowall and Per Wahloo, fifty per cent masculine, with *The Man Who Went Up in Smoke.* Jeremy Potter's *The Dance of Death* is a sound first effort, indisputably male. Nor must we forget E. Richard Johnson *(Mongo's Back in Town)* or Selwyn Jepson *(The Angry Millionaire).* And burn my britches if that's not ten in all!

So there was no real reason for such incessant squawking. The present is bright; with beaming face I anticipate a still brighter future; let me be known as Carr the Glad Guy, blood kin to Pollyanna herself. Meanwhile, as sanity insurance for 1970, has anybody got a copy of *The Complete Father Brown*?

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Continuing the criminological career of Godfrey "Odds" Bodkins, the London bookie (or, as he prefers to be called, Turf Accountant) who now doubles as a detective . . . in the baffling case of, believe it or not, a computerized horserace!

ODDS BODKINS AND THE COMPUTER DERBY

by RICHARD CURTIS

YOU'RE AWARE, I'M SURE, THAT our fair isles were recently visited by that dreaded affliction, hoof-and-mouth disease. It was heartbreaking to see farmers and breeders slaughtering whole herds of livestock and plowing them under or dumping them on huge pyres. It was a blow to national pride, too. On top of all our other miseries this plague added a particularly discouraging weight. Not that Britons have any money these days to spend on meat, mind you, but it's nice to think that if they did have, there would be meat available to spend the money on.

My own line of work was particularly hard hit. As a means of preventing the disease from spreading to racehorses, the government suspended horseracing indefinitely, giving not so much as a passing thought to how the bookmaking trade might be affected. I don't have to tell you it was ruddy nearly wrecked. My betting shop was so empty you'd have thought *I'd* started foaming at the mouth!

Well, for the first few days I was paralyzed as I watched the long list of entries fail to appear in my ledgers—until the pages looked as white as Hyde Park in a blizzard. The world of racing was positively blasted: jockeys got fat and punters thin, and half the males in London didn't know what to do with the loose change in their pockets.

But the English people have always prevailed over adversity. A number of my fraternity, congregating at the Queens Head to discuss the crisis over a pint, applied their intellects to the problem of how to stir the dormant action.

At first the ideas were rather uninspired. My old friend Tim Tubb suggested we try again to

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educate the public to like dog-racing, but he was booed off the stage. While there is a hard core of Englishmen who like to go to the dogs, so to speak, it's unlikely the sport will find great favor in the public eye, no matter how heavily it is promoted.

Ted Huddy, a rather lackadaisical hustler who could scarcely keep himself alive in the best of times, piped up with: "Why don't we promote bettin' on French races?"

The proposal was greeted by even more voluble dissent, which was summarized by yours truly. "It would never do, Teddy. For one thing, few horseplayers follow the French scene, and I doubt if they could be made to. They can't pronounce the horses' names. More to the point, I'll be blowed if *I'm* going to tout *any* French product, the political climate being what it is."

This outpouring of patriotic fervor was hailed with hear-hears from all over the pub, and some well-heeled gent across the room, wearing an "I'm Backing Britain" badge, had the barkeep refill my glass with his compliments.

Tim Tubb, patting his florid brow with a handkerchief, turned to me and said, "You must have a solution, Odds."

But while Godfrey "Odds" Bodkins is rarely without a creative response to any challenge, he hadn't a notion about this one. "My only idea," I said, "is that we try to stimulate interest in current events, such as which country will put men on the moon first." But this suggestion, coming on the heels of my anti-Gallic tirade, proved a big letdown to my colleagues, who muttered it into oblivion and washed it down with half-and-half.

Eager to restore my hard-won esteem I added, "I merely meant that we need some artificial situation to take the place of the genuine article."

It's amazing what a casual remark can sometimes lead to. Tim Tubb snapped his fingers. "That reminds me of something a friend of mine saw in the States." We all pressed closer to Tim, knowing that American innovations, while rarely realistic, were never uninteresting. "It's a supermarket gimmick, actually. When you make a purchase the clerk gives you a card with six horses listed on it: win, place, show, and three out of the money. Then every Saturday night they show a film of an old race on the telly. If one of the winners corresponds to one on your card, you collect."

The group murmured its grudging admiration of The American Way.

"Do you think we could do something like that there?" I asked.

"I'll bet BBC would go for it,"

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Ted Huddy said. "I 'ear Inland Revenue is losin' thirty-five thousand quid a day in bet taxes. They'll want to recoup losses, same as us." Mumbles of agreement from the company.

After the first blush of enthusiasm, however, came the invariable pessimistic reactions. We raised technical problems, such as finding old horserace films and negotiating for their use on television; and it would take time to print and distribute program cards. Besides, the whole thing smacked of a lottery, which is contrary to Her Majesty's laws. There has to be some skill in picking winners; the American system depended too much on getting a lucky card at the supermarket. Dolefully, we buried our lips in suds.

"Wait a moment," I said. "Maybe we *can* adapt the scheme."

Tim perked up, smiling elfinlike. "A sort of Modified American Plan, as they say in the hostelry game."

"That's it, Timmy. Look here, they've been simulating all sorts of sporting events on computers, like soccer. They feed data about two teams into the machine, press a button, and the computer tells who'd have won if the teams had played each other."

"Sounds like the doom o' sports," said a Lancashireman dourly.

"I don't think so," I replied. "Would you lose interest in a lass after a computer-calculated you'd be successful?"

"No," he admitted thoughtfully. "Not unless it included in its calculations just what m' wife would do to me."

When the laughter died down, Tim asked how I'd go about organizing a computerized horserace. After a few moments of reflection I explained. I would run the usual number of races a day, entering the names of horses that had been currently racing. I'd feed their performance records into the computer and push the button. Bookmakers would accept bets in exactly the same way they do for real races.

There was a long lull as my colleagues meditated. Then cheers as Tim Tubb announced, "I think you have it, old dear."

Accordingly, a deputation of bookmakers, among whom was your humble servant, proceeded to the offices of racing commissioners, broadcasting interests, and newspaper publishers. And happily, our proposal corresponded roughly to something these groups had already been considering. Some objections were raised, but none proved insurmountable. Modifications were made to lend more authenticity and excitement to the races—and to make them tamper-proof. Once a day an authority of the racing

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board would select a horse's name out of a hat, and that horse would be scratched. Another board member, before the first race, would pull from another hat a card listing special racing conditions: fast track, muddy track, windy day, and so forth, adding an element of unpredictability.

And to give bettors an even greater feeling of participation, the computer would be set up on the stage of a radio studio. An announcer, brilliantly improvising details, would broadcast results, making it seem as if the race were taking several minutes instead of the fraction of a second it took for the computer to determine the outcome. The audience could add its cheers to the recorded cheers of imaginary spectators, and to hear it on the wireless you'd swear the broadcast was coming live straight from the track.

Well, the computer Derby, while a poor substitute for the spectacle of straining horseflesh and bright silks, still proved highly popular during the hoof-and-mouth period. Though the bookmaking profession didn't approach the £1,500,000 in daily turnover it had been doing before the ban, the action did help us hold body and soul together until the crisis would be declared over.

All went as well as could be hoped in the first fortnight of the electronic experiment, but in the third week I was hit by a series of sizeable losses. The first was a 6-to-1 shot on which a gray-haired chap in bowler whom I'd never seen before bet £300 and won. Two days later a plump lady in a green coat, also unfamiliar to me, put £2000 on a 3-to-2 shot and took me for a bundle. The day after, a bald and bespectacled man entered my shop wishing to place £500 on a 9-to-1 entry. I accepted his bet, but studied him for several moments as I wrote up the receipt, for I was certain I'd seen him before. I seemed to recall him wearing a military mustache the last time I had set eyes on him. But where I'd seen him I couldn't remember. In any case, he won his bet, and that one hurt.

Now as much as I wish I were of a more trusting nature, my profession has instilled in me a somewhat suspicious attitude toward my fellow man. Unwholesome though it may be, it has steered me through this shark-infested sea called Life with some success. It was this cynicism, if you care to call it that, that led me to wonder if such a run of bad luck could be sheer coincidence. In short, the odor of a con job was beginning to assail my nostrils.

Hoping to confirm this suspicion I went to the Queens Head, where I encountered as glum a lot as any I'd beheld since

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Dunkirk. "We've taken a beating this week, Odds," Tim sighed, clinking his glass feebly with mine.

"Aye, I thought you might have."

"You too!"

I nodded lugubriously. "Timmy, do you remember what the big winners looked like?"

"I'm not about to forget eight thousand quid worth of payees," he replied bitterly, whereupon he proceeded to describe the very three individuals who had won at my shop. Ted confirmed it, and so did two others. I asked if they knew any of them from before. "The bald chap struck a bell wif me," said Ted. "Gave 'is name as Paul Delacourt, but that's a lie, I'll wager. I seen 'im somewhere, I'd lay fi' quid on it—if someone would stake me fi' quid."

"Picture him in a military mustache," I urged.

Teddy lapsed into a faraway look, muttering, "Military mustache." Then he slammed his fist on the bar. "Peter Darnell, that's your man!" We looked at one another blankly. "Don't you remember? The electrical bloke? Pulled the news-service job a few years back?"

It took a second or two, then recognition. Of course! He had indeed pulled a racetrack news-service swindle, and a handsome job it had been. He sliced the line between the track and the broadcasting station that relayed results to subscribing bookies. Then he linked a tape recorder into the line. The broadcast of a race was detoured into his recorder and he delayed transmission for a few minutes. During that time he contacted accomplices near betting shops and told them which horse had just won. They'd place bets on that horse just before "post time," the bookies not realizing that the race was already over. Then Darnell played his recording and the accomplices collected their winnings. But he tried it once too often and Scotland Yard had nailed him.

Now Darnell was out of prison and up to new tricks, and I had a pretty good idea about how he was performing them. "Keep your eyes out for any of the three crooks, lads, and if you see one, follow him or her and report the address back to me. Don't try to be heroes. I'll be doing a spot of detective work myself."

The following day, leaving the operation of my shop to my faithful clerk Richard, I betook myself to the radio studio where Friday's Computer Derby was to be run. I had arranged for a meeting with the three "stewards" who had been selected to supervise the operation, and I was ushered into a small boardroom where these gentlemen sat waiting for me.

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I was awed before their august presences. Robert Thwart-Lytton, gray and bent but far from broken, was an old member of the racing board whose vigilance over the sport's ethics was legendary. Fulmer Craig, handsome and deeply tanned, had until his recent retirement been secretary of a government bureau and was now what you Americans call a gentleman farmer—prize cattle and all that sort of thing. Ian Fox, the third member of the board of stewards, directed a large manufacturing group. The three had been chosen because of their distinguished records of public service, and their love of horseracing. They were all monied too—yet I had a vague feeling that one of them wasn't monied enough."

I told them how the pattern of losses suffered by my companions and me had led us to believe we were being systematically victimized by a gang of crooks led by a particularly ingenious electronics expert. Thwart-Lytton, stern and direct, leaned forward and furrowed his brows. "Do I understand you to be suggesting that the Computer Derby is—is fixed, Mr. Bodkins?"

"That does put a fine point on it, but—yes, sir, that's our contention."

Fox, a pudgy, almost porcine fellow whom I disliked on sight, declared it preposterous. "Are you aware," he demanded, "of the lengths to which we have gone to prevent manipulation? The fellows who program and operate the computer were scrupulously screened, and are supervised personally by us every step of the way. All input data is scrutinized by us and all other conditions in the studio are minutely inspected. The area around the computer is wired for alarm against nighttime intrusions. In short, Mr. Bodkins, there isn't a possible chance the outcome of the Derby can be influenced."

Craig, the gentleman farmer, added the most forceful argument of all. "You seem to forget that at the last moment—*after* all bets are down—special variables are determined by picking them out of a hat. No one could learn earlier in the day just what those variables will be; even if one could he would not be able to place a bet, because no wagers are permitted after the hat containing those variables is removed from our locked vault. I assure you it is far easier to fix the results of a real race than those of a computerized one. A horse, for instance, can be drugged, but not a computer."

"And if," Thwart-Lytton said menacingly, "you are implying that one of the three of us—"

"Oh, no," I cried, wondering if my suspicions were that legible on my face.

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"—that one of us might be collaborating with the ring you mentioned, please be informed that in addition to our unimpeachable backgrounds of service to this nation, the members of this board are possessed of large holdings, and were deliberately selected because their independent means made them invulnerable to the temptations you are insinuating."

At this the three men rose, signaling most pointedly the end of the discussion. But Craig, the most sympathetic, softened their severity by saying, "In order to satisfy your doubts, which I'm sure linger in spite of all we've said, I don't think my colleagues would object to your presence on stage while today's Derby is being run."

"Indeed, he can pick the racing conditions out of the hat himself," Fox added, raising his cuffs in a sarcastic gesture that said, "See? Nothing up my sleeve."

Those of you who understand the double-talk of well-bred gentlemen will know that their suggestions were offered strictly to be declined. But I am not a well-bred gentleman—though I'm not ashamed to say I'm the fourth son of a midlands pub-owner. As a common businessman looking after my own interests and those of my fellow bookmakers, I accepted their invitation. In doing so I scanned their faces for deeper traces of irritation, hoping to perceive that one of them had something to hide. But the annoyance they directed at my ill manners was uniform, and no one seemed more anxious than the others to keep me from getting close to that computer.

During the running of the races I took everything in with an eye trained to spot the subtlest sleight of hand. But as far as I could see, and as much as I could understand, the operation was carried out legitimately. I'll own that I shuffled out of that studio a most discouraged fellow. Yet I still felt that one of those stewards was not entirely as righteous as he professed to be.

My depressed spirits were uplifted, however, by the greeting I received at the Queens Head that evening. Brian Shaughnessy, the septuagenarian of our little group, said that Peter Darnell himself had entered his shop and tried to place a large bet. Brian refused it politely on some pretext, and Darnell left disconcerted. Brian then locked up his shop and followed Darnell at a discreet distance to a commercial building in Holborn. Our old sleuth managed to find out which office was Darnell's, and posted himself outside, behind the partially open door of a water closet. In due time Brian saw one of Darnell's accomplices pass into the office. And when the door opened, Brian

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was able to see—a computer!

"He's figgerin' out th' winners on his own computher, is what I make of it," Brian concluded. Everyone murmured assent—except me.

"It's an intelligent deduction," I gently told the old fellow, "but I'm afraid it's the wrong one. You see, Darnell can't place a bet till he has all the information, and he can't have all the information until those 'variables' are pulled out of a hat—by which time betting is no longer permitted. Yet Darnell is placing bets early in the day."

"Then what does he use the computer for?" asked Ted Huddy.

I looked vacantly at my friends for some moments. Then the words I'd heard earlier that day from Craig, one of the stewards, echoed in my ear: you can drug a horse, he had said, but you can't drug a computer. Suddenly the answer came to me. "But you *can!*" I shouted, to the collective mystification of all present. "The computer *is* in a sense being drugged. Darnell, you see, is controlling it from the computer console in his office."

"You mean *his* computer is dictating the results of the races to the main computer in the radio studio?" asked Tim.

"Precisely. He is transmitting impulses into it that give the horse selected by him an advantage over the rest of the field."

"But that presupposes—"

"Someone on the inside who helped him link up the two machines," I said, finishing Tim's sentence. "And if you gents'll give me the night to sleep on it I'll meet you here tomorrow at this hour to tell you who it is."

As it turned out I didn't need a night's sleep. Walking has a way of shaking my loose thoughts into order, and as I made my way toward my flat reviewing all I knew about those three distinguished gentlemen I had spoken to today, one idea persistently thrust all others aside until I paused on a dark side street to confront it squarely. Then it made such obvious sense that I laughed aloud.

I rushed home, got a restless few hours of sleep, then climbed into my car at dawn and aimed it northwest.

By the time I reached my destination it was late afternoon. I turned off the main road onto a dirt road and pushed the car slowly toward the main building. While not surprised at what I saw, I was nevertheless filled with acute sadness to see the desolation: pasture land going to seed, fodder moldering, barn doors agape, no lowing of cattle or bleating of sheep. As I reached the crest of the hill on which the house stood I saw, in a valley several hundred yards down the

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far slope, an enormous patch of blackened ground.

I pulled to a halt before the farmhouse. The twin barrels of a shotgun emerged from the front door, followed by the man I had come to take back to London. "It will do you no good to kill me, Mr. Craig," I said to the ruddy-cheeked gentleman farmer. "My friends have been advised that if I don't contact them by nightfall they are to send the police after me."

Craig hesitated, then lowered his gun and leaned his full weight on a gate as if he were about to collapse. "So now you know," he said.

I took the shotgun from his hands, removed the shells, and placed the weapon against the gate. "There," I said, gesturing with my chin toward the blackened circle, "is where you had them destroyed."

He nodded. "Hundreds of them. Every last one. Dozens of champions among them. Come into the house and I'll show you the ribbons and cups and citations. I had to convert my den—there were so many. . ."

I stood speechless. The man was heartbroken.

"And only one steer was infected. Why did they have to condemn every head I owned? Didn't they know it would bankrupt me? I had to raise money fast or sell this place. What would you have done?"

His pathetic question, and the dismal state of that once-magnificent place, were to haunt me for a long time.

"That's what happens to your landed gentry," Tim said later that night at the Queens Head. I had delivered Craig to the authorities, and Darnell and Company were also safely in custody, and I had turned up at the pub exactly as promised.

" 'e's landed all right—in the choky!" chortled Ted Huddy.

" 'T'isn't funny, laddies. The man lost everything he had," I said.

"That's no cause for him to take everything *we* had," Tim indignantly retorted.

"They say the hoof-and-mouth crisis is almost over," Brian Shaughnessy commented. " 'T'will be good to be dopin' real nags again. I can figger thim easier'n I can thim eelectronic brains, 'ey, Odds?"

"Indeed," I answered. "And if you'll all forgive the pun I will declare I can't make heads nor tails out of a computer."

The collective groan seemed to indicate that no one in the Queens Head was prepared to forgive the pun.

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An unusual story—unusual in theme and unusual for EQMM . . . Again you may question why a story appears in EQMM. We grant there is no detection in "Crossing the Line," and in the more orthodox sense, no mystery. But there is suspense, and (we're going to be stubborn about this) there is crime. Admittedly the crime is by implication—offstage, in the wings; but it is the most stupendous crime in the history of mankind . . .

The author knows the sights, sounds, smells, the taste and feel of a sailing ship in passage—and of "the restless, eternal meadows of the sea." Perhaps this intimate knowledge is one of the reasons why the author chose the particular theme of this story (although there were obviously larger reasons); perhaps if more of us learned to know the sea at first-hand, to soak in its meanings and connotations, its elementals . . . perhaps . . .

CROSSING THE LINE

by THOMAS MILLSTEAD

LONG BEFORE DAWN THE RAIN eased, but the dripping booms and rigging kept him soaked. Oakes's right hand felt as though the damp and the cold had lashed it to the tiller.

The new day was dark, thick with mist. The planes, if they were up, would again not sight the *Zacharias*.

Perhaps the search had been abandoned. It had been 36 hours since they had last heard the whine of a jet high above the squalls.

The thought sent a jolt of excitement through him. Oakes recalled those long-ago boyhood autumn mornings when he'd been roused early and taken out to hunt wild geese. A strange mood to recapture here, 27 days out of Hawaii, sailing a 42-foot ketch west-southwestward through the Pacific. But something about the grayness of the dawn, the snap to the air, the tension in him, brought it all back.

He'd usually shot well on those hunts and, returning home, the dead birds in his game pockets, their blood smelling like marshgrass, he'd felt nothing but satisfaction. Not a pang of regret.

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No, he wasn't squeamish. That's not, he was sure, what had brought him out here.

A choppy roller slammed the bow, gurgling and spitting spray.

"Over the plate!" shrilled a desolate voice. "And he goes down swinging!"

Oakes smiled. The parrot, swaying atop the cabin roof, shook its wet feathers in forlorn outrage. Louse-ridden and elderly, the bird has been a sorority sister's gift to Kathy Kalos. Kathy had christened it Spinoza, partly because of its hooked, haughty profile but mainly because the Dutch philosopher had been long a favorite of Oakes and the subject of a biography he'd once written. She'd tried to teach the bird some lines from *Ethics*, but it would repeat only phrases picked up from baseball announcers during its tenure with an earlier owner. Spinoza—the parrot—was no philosopher and, worse, not much of a sailor.

But it had survived the mauling storms of the last week, which was no mean achievement. A main topmast stay had parted. Mountainous seas had buried them one instant, flung them skyward the next. The *Zacharias* had shuddered with the cellolike tremble that only a true gale wrings from a sailing ship.

She had taken it and ridden it out, Oakes reflected with pride. Bowl-shaped, short-masted, she was a stout, safe riding vessel.

The hatch slide opened and Tim Ferris' lanky body towered over the cabin.

"No rain! Now I know how Noah felt that forty-first day."

A loose grin crossed his face. As a graduate student he had seemed, to Oakes, hunched and uneasy. On this cramped ship he stood straight and his large seaman's hands hung freely at his sides.

"Anything happening?" Tim asked.

Oakes knew what he meant. The sound of a plane, the light of a ship?

"Nothing." And then he went on, "Spinoza was feeling playful when I came up. I chased him around the foreshrouds but he wouldn't be caught. So he's had to sit out the watch with me. I don't know which of us is more bedraggled."

"You'd best be getting below, sir."

"I've had my pipe to keep me going."

Tim leaned against the cabin and crossed his arms. His question was casual. "When do we cross the line?"

"Without sextant readings, of course, I can't be sure. I'd estimate ten to twelve hours."

"I see," said Ferris.

The "line" was the circle drawn around Elliston Atoll by the newest nation to build a hydrogen

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bomb. All unauthorized vessels had been forbidden to cross this boundary into the danger zone during the nuclear test series.

"This pea soup," said Tim, "looks good for another ten, twelve hours."

"I should think so."

Only after the ketch was two weeks at sea had friends of Oakes informed the United States government of the *Zacharias'* destination and of its purpose to cross into the prohibited area as a protest against all nuclear detonations. Bad weather had since thwarted the government's efforts to intercept the vessel.

"Kathy's making coffee," said Tim. "I heard her banging around."

Oakes relinquished the tiller and stretched. He stamped across the deck, trying to restore circulation to his legs. He found a flying fish beneath the forestaysail, its goggling eyes unfocused and cold. They'd had fish often enough on this cruise and there was no shortage of other provisions. He pitched the fish overside. His gaze followed the line of the bowsprit, aimed dead ahead at Elliston Atoll. No horizon line. Only a clumsy stitching together of the matching grayness of water and sky. Oakes pulled at the bill of his shapeless 25-year-old Army fatigue cap. He was a stocky man, heavy in the shoulders and hips, but not at all fat. His weather-coarsened face, too wide and too flat to be distinguished, was capped by an untidy thatch of white hair. It was a serene face, with eyes a placid blue.

As he reached for the hatch it opened. "Good morning, Professor. There's a whole pot on down below."

Kathy beamed at him, her clear olive skin glowing, her black hair tumbling down to the shoulders of a tightly buttoned jacket. She was taller than Oakes and this had always seemed to amuse her.

"Good morning, Kathy Tim is in the cockpit."

"Breakfast in a jiffy."

She started aft and an off-stride wave smashed the *Zacharias* broadside. Spinoza shrieked, fluttering its wings. The cup flew from Kathy's hand. Tim shot to his feet, reached out a long arm, and pulled her to him.

"Damn!" she yelped. "Over the side, cup and all!"

"That's what happens," said Tim, "when you let the cook out of the galley. Should keep her locked up there. Old nautical tradition." She leaned sideways and kissed him. His free, left arm encircled her.

"As an able seaman you're a flop. But as a chef now—"

"It's been kind of fun," she said.

"On that stove? It's a relic from the *Bounty*."

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"Oh, you have to get things organized."

"That raisin pudding was organized pretty good last night."

"That was nothing. Wait till I make you keftehes," she teased.

"Keftehes?"

"Greek. My specialty. Meatballs, really, with mint leaves. An old family recipe. I love to make them. Oh, there are so many things I could cook for you—"

"And wash and clean and darn my socks?" He said it lightly, mockingly.

"Yes, Tim."

"Kathy—"

"Yes, Tim. I want to."

Ferris pulled her close against him. "Kathy, we cross the line in a few hours." His hand slid through her long loose hair. " 'Her hair, black as a raven feather that do sit on yon willow tree . . .' " His voice trailed off. "There are about a thousand more verses."

"I want to hear every one."

"Sometime. When there is time."

"They'll find us, won't they?"

"We all agreed before we sailed that we'd push on. As far as we could."

"I know."

"And if they don't—"

"But that was before. Before we knew, really knew, each other. I want us to get back. I want you and a house of our own—"

"Thank you—typical hausfrau from Scarsdale!"

The fourth person aboard, Wayne Dorr, his hands in his pockets and straddling the swaying deck, appeared suddenly. He raised his voice to a whine. " 'Give me a mortgage on a split-level and a barbecue pit in the back yard and the rest of the world can go to hell'."

Tim kept his arm around Kathy. "I thought you were sleeping, Wayne," he said.

"Too keyed up."

"Didn't the skipper tell you to patch the jib?"

"Patch it? For what—the trip back?"

Wayne laughed, his mouth closed, sniffing lustily through his nose.

In four catlike steps he joined them. His hair was red and his fair skin burned but never tanned. During the voyage he had cultivated a beard. Silken and fiery, it was now long enough to permit him to tug at it forcefully.

"You could have tried to get the radio going," Kathy said to him.

"It's defunct. Told you, during the storm."

"It wouldn't hurt to try. We might hear *something*."

"Oh, I wondered when they'd fall!"

Tim scowled. "When, what would fall?"

"The masks. The Crusaders-for-Humanity masks." He hopped

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up on the lifelines and rode them easily. He was agile and had proved himself invaluable at inspecting and repairing the halyards and running gear.

"We all boarded this scow with visions of Gandhi dancing in our heads. Now you two want out."

Kathy pushed angrily against the coaming over the cockpit. "We never said that. We believe in what we're doing as much as you do. But when this is over we want to get back. Is that so terrible?"

"You both volunteered. You were eager enough to make the grand gesture. You know we considered the possibility of—"

"That's enough, Wayne," said Tim softly.

"We're making our point," Kathy flared. "The world knows what we're trying to say."

Wayne sounded his staccato, sniffing laugh. "To the world we're crackpots! Weirdos! Don't you know that? It's only spilled blood that makes a stink the world can't ignore!"

Kathy put her hand on Tim's shoulder and stepped back on deck. I'll finish breakfast."

Wayne's eyes followed her. "How many," he asked, "have ever had the opportunity for such a sacrifice?"

Kathy pointed. "What's that?"

It was off the starboard beam, something yellow in the slaty smudge.

Tim shoved the tiller to port. "Could be a life jacket. Get the skipper!"

With night the wind grew sharper and began quartering.

"Sails may need reefing," Oakes murmured.

"I can handle it now," Tim said.

"We'll wait a bit. We're making knots. And the glass hasn't fallen."

"How's the patient?"

"He came to again for a while. Didn't say much more. Just that his jet went down two days ago in that gale, before he could radio his position."

"He doesn't look too good."

"Mainly exposure, although he tore some ligaments in his right leg. I gave him a shot of morphine and taped up the leg."

"Does he know we're—"

Oakes took off his cap and mashed his fist into it, as though there were still stiff spots in the crumpled cloth which prevented a proper fit.

"I don't suppose so. No, I don't suppose so . . . Why don't you look in on him?"

"Aye, sir."

The flyer, a pillow propping him up, had his eyes open. He held a cup of coffee in both hands. Kathy was bent over him while Wayne peered over her shoulder.

"That ought to revive you,"

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Tim grinned, ducking his head in the closet-sized cabin. "Kathy makes it strong."

The man smiled through scab-encrusted lips. He was in his late twenties, muscular, with a black crewcut. His swollen face was raw from the cutting winds and red where the hardened salt had been scrubbed from it.

"Glad to be aboard. Delighted, I might say. Lieutenant Michael Bradley, U.S. Navy."

"Tim Ferris. You've met the skipper?"

There was the hint of a drawl in the quiet voice. "Not formally. The older man who was here before?"

"Oakes. Lorenz Oakes."

"Then this is the *Zacharias?*"

"That's right," said Wayne. "You've heard of us?"

Bradley carefully set down his coffee. "Oh, have I, old son! You were being hunted like the last possum in the county. But we couldn't tree you. Not in that weather . . .If I might ask, when will I be getting off this vessel?"

"As soon as we're stopped," Kathy replied. "They're looking for us."

"You won't be stopped," Bradley said. "Not by your Uncle Samuel."

"We've heard planes—"

"Most likely looking for me. They've probably given that up, too, by now. No, you were spotted a week or so ago sailing east."

"We lost our dinghy in one of those gales," said Tim. "we spent some time backtracking till we found it."

"Then a day or so ago some ship—a Brazilian freighter or something—radioed they'd seen you farther east, still Hawaii bound. That cinched it."

Tim saw the look in the girl's face. He pushed farther into the cabin and planted himself beside her.

"So now," Bradley went on dryly, "I'm wondering what they did see. A fishing boat off course? A white whale? You crossed the line by now?"

"Just about," said Tim.

"No U.S. ship is going to follow this far. We've been warned to stay outside. We expected other countries to respect that kind of warning when we were holding tests out here. If they knew, for sure, there were Americans in the test zone . . . But as it is . . .And I don't expect *they* have many ships crusing around and looking for trespassers. Maybe they wouldn't much give a damn if you were inside the zone."

Wayne stroked his russet beard. "We'll make it into the restricted zone then."

The look of exhaustion that Bradley had worn when they dragged him from the sea flowed back into his face.

"That's right. Clear sailing from here to Elliston.The hottest show

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on earth. It's what you all want, isn't it?"

"We are trying," Tim began, "to demonstrate our belief that—"

"You wouldn't understand!" Wayne shouted at Bradley. "Your sort never does! You can understand dying in a war, killing other men. That's brave, that's noble! But you can't understand dying in a gesture for peace, dying for the love of humanity!"

"All I understand," Bradley drawled, "is that I don't crave to tag along."

"We didn't ask you to join us," said Wayne. "But we can't change anything because you did. This ship has a rendezvous."

"Weirdos," Bradley said evenly.

"Think what you like! You're part of it now!"

"That I doubt, old son. Your professor won't put my skin on the line for his principles. While I'm on board your trip's off."

"Then you've got to go!"

Wayne flung his small body forward. His hands closed on Bradley's throat.

"Wayne!"

Tim lunged toward them. The ship tilted. The low-slung oil lantern slammed Ferris over the eye. He reeled back. Kathy clawed at Wayne Dorr.

"What's happening here?"

Oakes's bulky body filled the room. He elbowed Kathy aside and, almost effortlessly, yanked Wayne off Bradley.

"It's going, going," the agitated parrot screamed from the galley. "It's gone! Over the fence!"

Wayne, pushing past them, lurched out of the cabin.

Bradley gently rubbed his throat. "We have just had a demonstration of one man's all-consuming love for humanity and nonviolence."

"Are you all right?"

"Sure."

"Kathy," said Oakes, "take Tim to the medicine locker and fix up that cut. And calm down Spinoza. Feed him or something. Tim, when you get a chance tell Wayne to take the helm. I lashed it down when I heard the racket in here."

"Aye, sir."

"Well," Oakes said, turning back to Bradley, "you seem to be something of a disruptive influence."

"I only told the bearded gentleman that with me aboard you'd be swinging this craft around. That seemed to rile him."

"I hadn't realized Wayne was that—excitable. I selected my volunteers from what I thought were the most responsible graduate students. No campus hippies. I tried hard to avoid the fanatics."

"How could you, on a trip like this?"

Oakes's face lit up in a smile.

"You are saying a rational man cannot put principle above

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personal considerations, Mister—Mister—?"

"Lieutenant Michael Bradley."

"Lieutenant, I think this would do us both some good."

Oakes opened a hanging locker and extracted a bottle. He poured two shot glasses.

"To peace," he toasted.

"Amen."

They drank.

"I didn't expect," Bradley commented, "good brandy on a vessel called *Zacharias*. To me this sounded more like a floating revival camp."

"Maybe the name is pretentious. I don't really feel like Jehovah's angry man."

"Well, I'm not sure who Zacharias was, but it does have a kind of grim ring."

"He was a prophet, Lieutenant. The Old Testament. 'Full in the presence of the people he stood up and gave them a message from the Lord God: What means it that you so trangress the Lord's command to your peril . . . But they gathered around him and stoned him'."

Bradley sloshed brandy about in his mouth before swallowing it. "You consider that you're up to the same kind of thing that Zacharias would be if he were around today?"

"It doesn't take much of a prophet to look into a mushroom cloud and foretell disaster."

"People been talking a long time now about some lunatic pushing that little button. No one has. There's more common sense around than most people think."

Oakes braced himself against a bulkhead, feet widespread. With his huge back bent he looked almost deformed. The serenity left his face. Without it he was an ugly, aging man.

"If you'll permit a quotation. Pascal. 'The unfortunate thing is that he who would act the angel acts the brute'."

Bradley sighed. "I told your crew. None of our people is looking for you any more. There's nobody going to stop you. Are you going to take me back?"

Oakes placed the bottle in Bradley's hands. "Have another, if you wish, Lieutenant. I'd better get topside. I believe I'd best check the rigging."

Shaggy columns of waves still bore down on them at dawn. The wind, back in the northeast, continued sharp.

But patches of blue glinted through increasingly large rents in the cloud cover and a sallow sun was occasionally visible. The sea, for the first time, was the pale turquoise of the tropics.

Oakes, an unlit pipe in his mouth, studied the sails. They bulged, shivering at their edges. None had been taken in, despite the night's shifting winds.

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Skimming along with the bone in her teeth, he thought. A fine, fat, little craft, the *Zacharias*. She could breast-stroke her way anywhere, even around the world. What an adventure that would be. Take a sabbatical, relish the solitude, have an opportunity to ponder the new book his mind had been toying with.

Spinoza was motionless atop the cabin roof. Oakes poked a finger at its beak, but the dozing parrot ignored him. Oakes made his way aft.

Wayne was holding the tiller. Kathy and Tim were standing beside each other, gripping the lifelines. All three had been waiting a long while.

"Well," said Oakes, "how does the crew feel about it?"

"Keep on," said Wayne. "That's why we came."

"And you two?"

"Someone needs to do what we're doing," Kathy began. "Only—"

Tim's big hand closed over hers. "You're the skipper," he told Oakes.

Creamy foam hissed past the blunt prow. Oakes sucked deeply of the salt breeze.

"A good day," he remarked. A clean day. The restless, eternal meadows of the sea. The sky. The air. Fresh. Pure. As new as this morning.

"Well," he said to them, "the lieutenant was right, at any rate. I can't force him to come with us. We'll put about at once."

"Hallelujah!"

It was Lieutenant Michael Bradley, looking ludicrous in Oakes's sweater and slacks—to short for him in the arms and legs and too bulgy at the waist and hips. He hauled himself gingerly onto the deck.

At that instant his foot skidded from under him. Another dead flying fish, which he had stepped on, skittered across the deck and over the side.

Bradley screamed, involuntarily, horribly, as he landed heavily on his injured leg. He sat up at once, his face contorted in agony.

"Curve ball! High inside!" Suddenly awakened, Spinoza cried out, wings fluttering in alarm. "He goes down swinging."

"Damn you!" Bradley shrieked, spinning about in pain-wracked fury.

His arm swept over the top of the hatch. There was a quiver of color, a blur of yellow, blue, and green. A piercing, stifled screech. Savagely Bradley hurled thd inert lump into the sea. The action was over so swiftly that a few feathers still hung in the air.

Oakes froze, standing over the fallen man, unable to move the arm he had been about to extend.

Bradley slumped back, limp.

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"I'm sorry I didn't mean to do that. I'm sorry."

"Help him," Oakes told Tim. He rested his arms on the mizzen boom and peered into the Pacific. A vastness over which would soon bloom a man-made sun. And, perhaps soon again, somewhere else, another one. And inevitably, somewhere else, still another one. And someone then would say, "I'm sorry—I didn't mean to do that."

But there would be no one to hear it.

Oakes turned. He pitched his voice to the level he would use in dismissing a large class. "We'll drop you off in the dinghy, Lieutenant. Your chances of rescue are good. Tim, keep the *Zacharias* on course."

Wayne Dorr's mouth moved somewhere in the smear of his beard, but now words came out. His eyes shone, excitedly at first, then with something glazed and entirely different.

Kathy laid her face against Tim Ferris' shoulder. He put his fingertips gently to her cheekbones. She looked intently at him, then swung her gaze out to sea. Tim's arm held her tightly.

"On course it is, sir," Tim said. A driving breeze abaft the beam, the ketch *Zacharias* pushed dead ahead.

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A lovely, lovely fantasy-detective-crime story . . . Meet Big Jake O'Hara and his daughter Finula, that fine figure of a woman, and Police Constable Phelim Hegarty, that fine broth of a man—and the Unholy One, the Devil himself.

It all started when Hell was unionized, and it became worse when Hell went on strike. Ah, but take it up for yourself—a lovely, lovely yarn! . . .

THE DEVIL FINDS WORK FOR JAKE O'HARA

by BRIAN CLEEVE

DID YOU EVER HEAR ABOUT how the Devil was trying to get back into Hell the time it was unionized, and about how Jake O'Hara was to help him? Oh, a murderous story, murderous. And Jake's daughter? Finula? And how Police Constable Hegarty got to be a Superintendent and won the medal? You didn't? Never? Wait there till I tell you.

You mind Jake O'Hara, at least? But you don't mind him the way I mind him, years back, when he was drinking like Finn's salmon and was barred and banned out of every respectable pub in London. You don't mind him then, I'll bet. A great big awkward bony crag of a boyo, with red hair and freckles, and half his teeth missing where friends had kicked them out of him away back when he still had friends, and nothing in the world in his favor except his daughter Finula and her true love for him.

A fine girl, God bless her, like a young galleon in jaunty sail, black hair rippling in glossy ringlets on her head, and green eyes flashing; it'd do your heart good to see her, so long as her eyes weren't flashing at you, and she with a a left hook that would flatten a sailor.

But anyway, imagine one Saturday morning and Big Jake stretched on a vacant building site with enough bad whiskey inside him to set fire to the Thames, his ugly mouth gaping, and his breath snorting and rattling in the

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depths of unconsciousness. His head on a brick and his feet on another and his pockets as empty of money as his heart was of virtue. And there comes Finula, ready for blue murder, after being told by someone that her da was stretched as usual after spending his dole money the night before.

"If I could catch the villains that do be leading him astray, the poor innocent," she wails over him that deserved nothing but a stiff boot in the ribs, the ugly wretch. And Police Constable Hegarty approaching also, who was just the handsome, upright young police officer who'd have been prepared to give him exactly that, if he hadn't loved Finula to distraction.

So between the two of them they wake him up and sit him up, with young Hegarty brushing his fingers against hers as they lever Big Jake off the bricks and the lumps of cement where he's been sleeping, and the love leaps in Phelim Hegarty's heart like a fish, and lies on hers like a weight, because she knows, ochone, that if she was to marry Phelim, her dreadful da would hang round both their necks like a stone and ruin them.

"Oh, Janey," Big Jake is crying, "me head, me stomach, if I could get that greasy swine that sold me that rogut I'd put me foot down his throat till I could kick his kidneys. Oh, me eyeballs. I'd sell my suffering soul for one decent bottle of potstill Irish."

"Don't be saying such things, Father darling," Finula whispers in a scared voice. "Not even in joking." And she looks over her sweet, powerful shoulder as if she expects to see the Devil himself there with the bottle and the contract. But all there is is two small decent men with sandwich boxes and hungry looks.

"Will we give you a hand with him?" says the dark one, and don't they pick up Jake's feet that are like a couple of bulldozers in size-12 boots—many's the wicked time he used them for what they weren't meant to be used for, even on Finula's saintly mother, God rest her soul in Heaven, and the constable takes him by the craggy shoulders and the three of them carry him, cursing the gentlest bumps and lurches they give him, all the way to the tenement house where he lives with Finula, and all the way up seven flights of stairs to the freezing attic room that she tries to keep clean and decent with a stick of furniture and a bit of cretonne and two old mattresses on the floor for beds.

So they dump him down on one of the mattresses and Phelim settles his helmet on his head and shuffles his feet and says he has to be getting back on the beat or the sergeant'll have his life,

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and Finula goes down to the street door with him to thank him, saying to the two wee men that she'll wet the tea for their kindness if they'll wait for her a minute.

And the second she's out of the door doesn't one of them, the dark one, bend down by Big Jake's ear and say very softly, "Here's the bottle of whiskey, Jake. And more where it came from. Is it a deal?"

Jake stares at the whiskey like it's a mirage. Then the cork is out and the neck in his throat and he sucking at it like a calf at an udder. But devil a drop of whiskey comes out of it. The liquor stays upside down as if it was solid.

"The deal first," says the Devil, for who else was it except himself? "The deal, Jake. Your soul for the liquor, and a small matter of pulling a switch when you get down below. Is it a deal now? Quick, before herself gets back."

"It's a deal, damn you," snarls Jake round the neck of the bottle, and feels his free hand gripped by the small horny one of himself, and the split second their hands shake, doesn't the whiskey liquefy and go *glug glug* down the raw funnel of Jake's throat. When back comes Finula, sees the empty bottle falling from his speechless grasp, takes in at least part of the situation with one daughterly glance, and catches the Devil such a swinging open-hander on his left lug that she knocks him flat.

"As if I haven't enough," she says in a low dangerous voice, thinking of the conversation she'd just had with Phelim. "Marry me," says he, "or else," says he, leaving her to imagine whether the "else" was that, if she didn't he'd go off and marry Rose McCarthy from The Harp and Crown that had been after him for years past, or the next time he found Big Jake drunk he'd throw him in the nick and stomp the rest of his teeth out.

"Me hat," screams the Devil, which same hat has fallen off and rolled into a corner, and he grabs for it and claps it back on, but too late. For hasn't Finula seen the two wee horns on his baldy forehead and the fierce widow's peak of him darting between them. And she's that stomached with fright and shock that she can't raise her hand to bless herself or open her lips for a pious word. At least for that second. And the Devil thinks that his hour is come, because if a young Irish girl of virginity and beauty of spirit was to let fly at him with a pious word the belt on the ear Finula had just given him would be nothing to it.

"Wait," he says. "Don't be rash. Let's discuss this like decent people without recourse to vulgarity or violence."

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"Vulg—" Finula starts, her bosom heaving, and a sight that made, I can promise you. "Vulgari—"

"I have him," says the Devil. "I have yer da fast, and anything in the way of a nasty altercation between you and me is going to do him no good, if you're after plain speaking. Now will you hold your whisht long enough to let me talk to you?"

"Hold me—" Finula pants, her lovely hands turning into sizeable fists and beating against her sizeable bosom. "If I hit you again it won't be with me flat hand, you nasty, dirty little—"

"Now, now," says the Devil, backing out of reach, "let's be calm. You want to marry Phelim Hegarty, am'n't I right? And you want your da to stop drinking and be respectable? Am'n't I still right? Supposing I write that into the deal? As a bonus?"

"Marry Phelim?" she says faintly "Me da stop drinking?" she says, fainter. "Be respectable?" she whispers, so faint you couldn't hear her.

"Signed and sealed," says the Devil. "In front of a witness. Belfy, you're witness."

And the other wee gurrier takes off his ugly hat and makes her a bow. "Your sarvant, ma'am," he says.

"What's more," says the Devil, "I'll make Phelim a superintendent inside a twelve-month. With back pay for the rank since last April."

"Back pay?" whispers Finula.

"And just for the hell of it I'll give Rose McCarthy a dose of warts that would frighten a bullock."

"Warts?"

"No less. And your da so respectable that he'll be on television."

"Mercy," whispers Finula. "On television?"

She hardly feels the horny wee hand grasp hers and begin to shake it. Half of her expects fire and brimstone and the smell of sulphur, and the other half is wondering if money will start falling through the broken windows; and a wee fragment of her between the two halves is thinking "Warts."

For it's a terrible truth, and a bitter sorrow to me to be obliged to repreat it, but never a soul fell into temptation but it was kind of canted over to one side, so to speak, before the fall. And in the case of Finula it was Rose McCarthy that had done the canting. A blonde simpering halfwit of a strumpet that had never anything in her mind but the one thing, only the fellers were all too sotted with her contours and her gooseberry eyes to realize it—the one thing being their pay packets, of course.

Between the two of them, Finula O'Hara and Rose

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McCarthy, there wasn't the shadow of a fraction of a doubt which a sensible man would choose, even if he was judging only on the level of contours; but the doubt had sometimes crossed Finula's mind, at least in this respect, as to whether Phelim was entirely a sensible man. And Rose McCarthy hadn't Big Jake for a father and a millstone.

"Oh, mercy," whispered Finula. And there she is alone in the attic with her father snoring.

"We have them," screeches the Devil, "we have them surely."

"You have that," says Belfy, and out they go into the innocent sunshine, skipping and sniggering, and feeling that after the long years of misfortune and misery their evil luck had changed at last.

It all began the time Hell was unionized. I told you about that. Unionized? Red revolution more like, and the Devil and Belfy escaping by the skin of their wings and landing up in Kerry. But worse came. Hell went on strike.

It was all over Mrs. O'Leary, as a matter of fact, and her claiming that she was being victimized for being a shop steward in the Call Girls' Union and jacking up the rates. She lay there on her griddle, the shameless strap, screeching that the lads torturing her were nothing but hired lackeys of the boss class, and a disgrace to the Stokers' Union, until along comes the shop steward and she cons him into calling an unofficial strike on the grounds of victimization and shop stewards' solidarity.

So there's a shop stewards' meeting and a union meeting and a splinter group apprentices' meeting and a ginger group meeting and a breakway union meeting that wants a Laborers' Union with double time for playing blackjack at week-ends instead of just time and half for Sundays the way it was then; and between one meeting and another there wasn't a stim of torturing done for a week, and at the end of it there's 14 strikes going at the one time, and not a dead sinner in the place with an idea as to how to start settling the least one of them. Even the maintenance devils came out and the power supplies were cut entirely.

Which meant that the Devil and Belfy, who up till then had had ways of plugging in the power lines of Evil, so to speak, even though they were in exile, were brought at last to total destitution. Even the bottle of whiskey for Big Jake had to be bought in advance out of their National Assistance money, and the tiny effort of keeping the whiskey suspended solid in the bottle for ten seconds while they made the bargain, left the Devil out of funds of Evil for the next six weeks.

You see, they could *see* things,

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but they couldn't *do* things, if you follow my meaning. They could *see* Big Jake from a mile off and the bargain that there'd be that morning for a bottle of potstill Irish whiskey. But could they conjure that whiskey out of nothing the way they used to in the bad old days? Could they, hell. Not a drop. Not a cork. Not a label. They were reduced to buying it on their dole money like any other poor slob.

But spend a penny, make a pound. Once they have Big Jake, they have leverage. They can see the opportunities and he can take them. So that within a couple of months—long enough to get Big Jake dried out and sensible—they are all on the pig's back. New suits. Tan boots. Tyrolean hats. Belfy has a Malacca cane with a silver knob and the Devil has a gold one.

And as for Big Jake! Platinum teeth for a start. Ruby buttons on his waistcoat. Gold tags on his shoelaces. And Finula near drowning in mink. She even has mink pajamas except that they give her hay fever. While poor Rose McCarthy—covered. Warts like carbuncles. Couldn't sit down for them.

And all from playing the horses. The Devil gives Jake the winners and Jake plays them. They have to use Belfy's dole money for the first stake, but after that! You see, according to the rules of the game, the Devil isn't allowed to gamble. I mean to say, where would it end if he could? All he can do is to put someone else up to it and split the takings.

But with Big Jake he has a hold, so to speak. Yet even that comes unstuck, because after a couple of weeks of some really remarkable doubles and trebles, the bookies won't take a bet off Big Jake, nor anyone connected with him.

So what is there for it but to turn to crime? Not that any of this takes the Devil by surprise. I ask you. Counting on it, more like. Because it isn't gold-headed Malacca canes and fancy hats that himself wants out of Big Jake. It is a strikebreaker.

Adulterers, murderers, forgers, men that'll give their ever-loving partners a couple of black eyes on a Saturday night, child beaters, defaulting solicitors—they're two a penny, ten a penny. But a strikebreaker. A scab. A man sunk so low that he'd cross a picket line. *That* man would be damned hard to find.

But that's what the Devil has seen in Big Jake at the first glance. A man that had spent his working life, such as it had ever been, scabbing, undercutting, sucking up to the foreman for the cushy billet—every rotten trick in the scab's handbook is second nature to Big Jake, and this is the whole and soul reason

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why he is wanted by himself. To slide past the pickets and the strikers and the blackjack players and switch on the power again.

And once *that* is done, and the strikers and the shop stewards and the sinners and the apprentices are running every which way and accusing each other of breaking the sacredest rule in the whole Sinner's Lexicon—thou wilt rob thy old blind mother but thou shalt not scab—and the factions, parties, splinter groups, and the unofficials and the strike leaders are beating each other over the ears with picket signs and lengths of four-by-two and the like, *then* in will slip himself and Belfy.

In no time at all himself is back on the Infernal Throne talking sweet reason and salary increases to all concerned and offering to call in arbitrators. Or so he reckons.

But first himself has to keep his side of the bargain with Big Jake, and incidentally with Finula and Phelim. In as much time as it takes to buy a few sawed-off shotguns and get a gang together, Big Jake is a Napoleon of crime. Protection. Crooked Bingo games. There isn't a hole or corner of organized crime that Big Jake doesn't have his thumb in, and a right genius he proves to have for it.

Divil a chance the police have of cornering Big Jake, I can tell you. The Bank of England they rob. The Post Office they rob. The Prime Minister's residence at Number Ten they rob and steal his stamp collection along with his presentation gold-banded briar pipe from the King of Siam, or maybe it was from the Shah of Persia.

And all the while me bold Phelim isn't forgotten, because while Big Jake's gang will be operating with total immunity from legal interference, the Devil and Belfy with be handing over the opposition gangs to Phelim, caught *in flagrant delights*, as they say at the Old Bailey.

So Phelim is a sergeant, at which date he marries Finula, and then he's an Inspector, and then he's a Super, with a reputation as the biggest-ever crimebuster. And of course nothing will do the new Super but to go after the mysterious Mr. Big, as Jake has come to be known in the rougher parts of London.

"Get me me briar pipe back!" screeches the Prime Minister, "and I'll make you the Assistant Commissioner of Scotland Yard. I'll rechristen it Irish Yard. I'll do anything for ye," says he, "if you'll only get it back for me."

And off roars the bold Superintendent Phelim in his powerful Z-car and sends out network of agents and stool pigeons and, the Devil deciding that the time is now ripe for a bit of the real action, he fulfills

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the last of his bargain and gets Big Jake on to TV—on the Solomon Snow program. And if that isn't the heighth and breadth of respectability, I ask you, what is?

There's Big Jake in a silk suit with uranium buttons and Solomon Snow fawning on him, and they get on like a house on fire. While, at the Superintendent's semi-detached, the Devil knocks on the door and says, "Ahem, Super," when Phelim opens it. "Don't mention to the missus that I told you," says he "but that character on the telly," he says, "is Mr. Big," he says. The kind of message, of course, that he's often given to Phelim, although only about lesser fry than Mr. Big.

"Me da-in-law? says Phelim, thunderstruck, because he'd been given to understand by Finula and Big Jake that Big Jake is something in the City after coming in for a large legacy from his aunt in Australia. "Me own darling's da?" he whispers.

"The same one," says the Devil, "and you'd find him this very hour plottin' murder and ruffianism in his Park Lane apartment, with the evidence and proceeds of his nefarious robberies strewn around him like Aladdin's Cave," says the Devil. "But take care," says he, "for he's vowed to shoot on sight if an officer of the law so much as breathes through the keyhole. If I were you I'd try the service lift and bring an equalizer." And thereupon the Devil vanishes in his Mini-Minor with a puff of smoke out of the chromium exhaust pipe.

Minutes later, round the Devil goes to Big Jake and says, "Hell knows what rat split on us. Chief, but that son-in-law of yours has got the lowdown on you," he says, "and he's gunning for you," says he, "and swearing to get you like a monkey on a stick." Rubbing his hands together, he says, "He'll be round within the hour."

"We'll blast him," screeches Belfy, and the gang get out the sawed of arbitrators and they barricade the doors of the superb Park Lane 14-room apartment Big Jake has as his business pad. But, as advised, Phelim comes up the service lift which the Devil has left conveniently unbarricaded and he bursts in with his trusty police-constable driver and they see the state of armament in the room and they blast Big Jake where he stands, having previously obtained a special license to carry firearms from a qualified magistrate, that being the law and necessity of such actions in Park Lane.

And of course the gang and Big Jake are not doing nothing while they are getting blasted. They are blasting right back and they make a terrible mess of the Superintendent in particular and

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create grievous wounds in the sergeant and the heroic police-constable driver who afterwards both receive medals. But Big Jake and Phelim are lying flat on the Aubusson carpet gurgling their last, so that Phelim's medal has to be strictly post-humorous.

"Well, well," says the Devil. "One for us and one for them," and he tosses the poor soul of Phelim out of the window where it floats upwards to where all good policemen go at the last whistle, and he tosses the black cindery soul of Big Jake, t w i s t i n g and cursing, down the lift shaft, and a lot farther.

"Keep your side of it," he screeches after Big Jake. "Switch on the power."

And him and Belfy slide off to the local to wait events.

Well, I'll tell you. They're still waiting. For if Big Jake switched on the power again it wasn't for the Devil and Belfy he was going to do it. It was for himself. "I kept my side of the deal," says he, "Sure wasn't it the first thing I did to cross the picket line and switch on the power again? But divil a bit the bargain said about who I was to switch it on for."

He's sitting down there now running the biggest crime syndicate in the Universe and recruiting the Mafia left and right, and he's let it be politely known that if the Devil or Belfy dare show their snouts inside his territory he'll make them rue the day. As for the power lines, he's had those blocked off so tight that not an amp or a watt or a spark of evil has the chance of escaping.

What happened to the two wee fellers?

The last I saw of them they were calling the numbers in one of Finula Hegarty's Bingo halls, the which she'd gone into in a big way of business, using her da's capital as a starter. Bingo halls, betting shops—the money that girl has been coining would balance the budget if she hadn't got the most expensive tax adviser in the business to keep her from having to pay her super-tax. Fourteen and elevenpence she returned as her profits last year, and her bathroom carpet made of Russian sables.

You can tell where she'll be going when the time comes. But a fine figure of a woman, there isn't a doubt. The finest. Both the Devil and Belfy had a try squeezing her waist more than once.

"The waist me heroic husband squeezed is sacred forever," she'd say and that was that. She'd hardly pay their wages, let alone allow them a free squeeze. The last time I spoke to them they were so sick of her they were talking about going into politics. And looking at the state of the nation, maybe they already have.

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a *NEW* story by

JOE GORES

"Goodbye, Pops" is not one of Joe Gores's skiptracing stories —a new semidocumentary "File" story will appear in EQMM soon. But fine as his fictional case histories are, "Goodbye, Pops" is probably the best story that Mr. Gores has yet written. It is deeply moving and deeply felt, and it has the whole outdoors in it, and if not the whole of man, a surprisingly large chunk of him in so short a story. The telling of "Goodbye, Pops" must have meant something profound to the author; the story may mean something equally profound to the reader . . .

GOODBYE, POPS

by JOE GORES

I GOT OFF THE GREYHOUND AND stopped to draw icy Minnesota air into my lungs. A bus had brought me from Springfield, Illinois to Chicago the day before; a second bus had brought me here. I caught my passing reflection in the window of the old-fashioned depot—a tall hard man with a white and savage face, wearing an ill-fitting overcoat. I caught another reflection, too, one that froze my guts: a cop in uniform. Could they already know it was someone else in that burned-out car?

Then the cop turned away, chafing his arms with gloved hands through his blue stormcoat, and I started breathing again. I went quickly over to the cab line. Only two hackies were waiting there; the front one rolled down his window as I came up.

"You know the Miller place north of town?" I asked. He looked me over. "I know it. Five bucks—now."

I paid him from the money I'd rolled a drunk for in Chicago and eased back against the rear seat. As he nursed the cab out ice-rimed Second Street, my fingers gradually relaxed from

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their rigid chopping position. I deserved to go back inside if I let a clown like this get to me.

"Old man Miller's pretty sick, I hear." He half turned to catch me with a corner of an eye. "You got business with him?"

"Yeah. My own."

That ended that conversation. It bothered me that Pops was sick enough for this clown to know about it; but maybe my brother Rod being vice-president at the bank would explain that. There was a lot of new construction and a freeway west of town with a tricky overpass to the old county road. A mile beyond a new subdivision were the 200 wooded hilly acres I knew so well.

After my break from the Federal pen at Terre Haute, Indiana two days before, I'd gotten outside their cordon through woods like these. I'd gone out in a prison truck, in a pail of swill meant for the prison farm pigs, had headed straight west, across the Illinois line. I'm good in open country, even when I'm in prison condition, so by dawn I was in a hayloft near Paris, Illinois some 20 miles from the pen. You can do what you have to do.

The cabby stopped at the foot of the private road, looking dubious. "Listen, buddy, I know that's been plowed, but it looks damned icy. If I try it and go into the ditch—"

"I'll walk from here."

I waited beside the road until he'd driven away, then let the north wind chase me up the hill and into the leafless hardwoods. The cedars that Pops and I had put in as a windbreak were taller and fuller; rabbit paths were pounded hard into the snow under the barbed-wire tangles of wild raspberry bushes. Under the oaks at the top of the hill was the old-fashioned, two-story house, but I detoured to the kennels first. The snow was deep and undisturbed inside them. No more foxhounds. No cracked corn in the bird feeder outside the kitchen window, either. I rang the front doorbell.

My sister-in-law Edwina, Rod's wife, answered it. She was three years younger than my 35, and she'd started wearing a girdle.

"Good Lord! Chris!" Her mouth tightened. "We didn't—"

"Ma wrote that the old man was sick." She'd written, all right. *Your father is very ill. Not that you have ever cared if any of us lives or dies* . . . And then Edwina decided that my tone of voice had given her something to get righteous about.

"I'm amazed you'd have the nerve to come here, even if they did let you out on parole or something." So nobody had been around asking yet. "If you plan to drag the family name through the mud again—"

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I pushed by her into the hallway. "What's wrong with the old man?" I called him Pops only inside myself, where no one could hear.

"He's dying, that's what's wrong with him."

She said it with a sort of baleful pleasure. It hit me, but I just grunted and went by into the living room. Then the old girl called down from the head of the stairs.

"Eddy? What—who is it?"

"Just—a salesman, Ma. He can wait until Doctor's gone."

Doctor. As if some damned croaker was generic physician all by himself. When he came downstairs Edwina tried to hustle him out before I could see him, but I caught his arm as he poked it into his overcoat sleeve.

"Like to see you a minute, Doc. About old man Miller."

He was nearly six feet, a couple of inches shorter than me, but outweighing me forty pounds. He pulled his arm free.

"Now see here, fellow—"

I grabbed his lapels and shook him, just enough to pop a button off his coat and put his glasses awry on his nose. His face got red.

"Old family friend, Doc." I jerked a thumb at the stairs. "What's the story?"

It was dumb, dumb as hell, of course, asking him; at any second the cops would figure out that the farmer in the burned-out car wasn't me after all. I'd dumped enough gasoline before I struck the match so they couldn't lift prints off anything except the shoe I'd planted: but they'd make him through dental charts as soon as they found out he was missing. When they did they'd come here asking questions, and then the croaker would realize who I was. But I wanted to know whether Pops was as bad off as Edwina said he was, and I've never been a patient man.

The croaker straightened his suitcoat, striving to regain lost dignity. "He—Judge Miller is very weak, too weak to move. He probably won't last out the week." His eyes searched my face for pain, but there's nothing like a Federal pen to give you control. Disappointed, he said, "His lungs. I got to it much too late, of course. He's resting easily."

I jerked the thumb again. "You know your way out."

Edwina was at the head of the stairs, her face righteous again. It seems to run in the family, even with those who married in. Only Pops and I were short of it.

"Your father is very ill. I forbid you—"

"Save it for Rod; it might work on him."

In the room I could see the old man's arm hanging limply over the edge of the bed, with smoke from the cigarette between

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his fingers running up to the ceiling in a thin unwavering blue line. The upper arm, which once had measured an honest 18 and had swung his small tight fist against the side of my head a score of times, could not even hold a cigarette up in the air. It gave me the same wrench as finding a good foxhound that's gotten mixed up with a bobcat.

The old girl came out of her chair by the foot of the bed, her face blanched. I put my arms around her. "Hi, Ma," I said. She was rigid inside my embrace, but I knew she wouldn't pull away. Not there in Pops's room.

He had turned his head at my voice. The light glinted from his silky white hair. His eyes, translucent with imminent death, were the pure, pale blue of birch shadows on fresh snow.

"Chris," he said in a weak voice. "Son of a biscuit, boy . . . I'm glad to see you."

"You ought to be, you lazy devil," I said heartily. I pulled off my suit jacket and hung it over the back of the chair, and tugged off my tie. "Getting so lazy that you let the foxhounds go!"

"That's enough, Chris." She tried to put steel into it.

"I'll just sit here a little, Ma," I said easily. Pops wouldn't have long, I knew, and any time I got with him would have to do me. She stood in the doorway, a dark indecisive shape; then she turned and went silently out, probably to phone Rod at the bank.

For the next couple of hours I did most of the talking; Pops just lay there with his eyes shut, like he was asleep. But then he started in, going way back, to the trapline he and I had run when I'd been a kid; to the big white-tail buck that followed him through the woods one rutting season until Pops whacked it on the nose with a tree branch. It was only after his law practice had ripened into a judgeship that we began to draw apart; I guess that in my twenties I was too wild, too much what he'd been himself 30 years before. Only I kept going in that direction.

About seven o'clock my brother Rod called from the doorway. I went out, shutting the door behind me. Rod was taller than me, broad and big-boned, with an athlete's frame—but with mush where his guts should have been. He had close-set pale eyes and not quite enough chin, and hadn't gone out for football in high school.

"My wife reported the vicious things you said to her." It was his best give-the-teller-hell voice. "We've talked this over with mother and we want you out of here tonight. We want—"

"*You* want? Until he kicks off it's still the old man's house, isn't it?"

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He swung at me then—being Rod, it was a right-hand lead—and I blocked it with an open palm. Then I back-handed him, hard, twice across the face each way, jerking his head from side to side with the slaps, and crowding him up against the wall. I could have fouled his groin to bend him over, then driven locked hands down on the back of his neck as I jerked a knee into his face; and I wanted to. The need to get away before they came after me was gnawing at my gut like a weasel in a trap gnawing off his own paw to get loose. But I merely stepped away from him.

"You—you m u r d e r o u s animal!" He had both hands up to his cheeks like a woman might have done. Then his eyes widened theatrically, as the realization struck him. I wondered why it had taken so long. "You've *broken out!*" he gasped. "*E s c a p e d!* a fugitive from—from justice!"

"Yeah. And I'm staying that way. I know you, kid, all of you. The last thing any of you want is for the cops to take me here." I tried to put his tones into my voice. "*Oh!* The *scandal!*"

"But they'll be after you—"

"They think I'm dead," I said flatly. "I went off an icy road in a stolen car in down-state Illinois, and it rolled and burned with me inside."

His voice was hushed, almost horror-stricken. "You mean—that there *is* a body in the car?"

"Right."

I knew what he was thinking, but I didn't bother to tell him the truth—that the old farmer who was driving me to Springfield, because he thought my doubled-up fist in the overcoat pocket was a gun, hit a patch of ice and took the car right off the lonely country road. He was impaled on the steering post, so I took his shoes and put one of mine on his foot. The other I left, with my fingerprints on it, lying near enough so they'd find it but not so near that it'd burn along with the car. Rod wouldn't have believed the truth anyway. If they caught me, who would?

I said, "Bring me up a bottle of bourbon and a carton of cigarettes. And make sure Eddy and Ma keep their mouths shut if anyone asks about me." I opened the door so Pops could hear. "Well, thanks, Rod. It *is* nice to be home again."

Solitary in the pen makes you able to stay awake easily or snatch sleep easily, whichever is necessary. I stayed awake for the last 37 hours that Pops had, leaving the chair by his bed only to go to the bathroom and to listen at the head of the stairs whenever I heard the phone or the doorbell ring. Each time I thought: *this is it.* But my luck held. If they'd just take long enough so I could stay until Pops

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went; the second that happened, I told myself, I'd be on my way.

Rod and Edwina and Ma were there at the end, with Doctor hovering in the background to make sure he got paid. Pops finally moved a pallid arm and Ma sat down quickly on the edge of the bed—a small, erect, rather indomitable woman with a face made for wearing a lorgnette. She wasn't crying yet; instead, she looked purely luminous in a way.

"Hold my hand, Eileen." Pops paused for the terrible strength to speak again. "Hold my hand. Then I won't be frightened."

She took his hand and he almost smiled, and shut his eyes. We waited, listening to his breathing get slower and slower and then just stop, like a grandfather clock running down. Nobody moved, nobody spoke. I looked around at them, so soft, so unused to death, and I felt like a marten in a brooding house. Then Ma began to sob.

It was a blustery day with snow flurries. I parked the jeep in front of the funeral chapel and went up the slippery walk with wind plucking at my coat, telling myself for the hundredth time just how nuts I was to stay for the service. By now they *had* to know that the dead farmer wasn't me; by now some smart prison censor *had* to remember Ma's letter about Pops being sick. He was two days dead, and I should have been in Mexico by this time. But it didn't seem complete yet, somehow. Or maybe I was kidding myself, maybe it was just the old need to put down authority that always ruins guys like me.

From a distance it looked like Pops but up close you could see the cosmetics and that his collar was three sizes too big. I felt his hand: it was a statue's hand, unfamiliar except for the thick, slightly down-curved fingernails.

Rod came up behind me and said, in a voice meant only for me, "After today I want you to leave us alone. I want you out of my house."

"Shame on you, brother," I grinned. "Before the will is even read, too."

We followed the hearse through snowy streets at the proper funeral pace, lights burning. Pallbearers wheeled the heavy casket out smoothly on oiled tracks, then set it on belts over the open grave. Snow whipped and swirled from a gray sky, melting on the metal and forming rivulets down the sides.

I left when the preacher started his scam, impelled by the need to get moving, get away, yet impelled by another urgency, too. I wanted something out of the house before all the mourners arrived to eat and guzzle. The guns and ammo already had been banished to the garage, since Rod

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never had fired a round in his life; but it was easy to dig out the beautiful little .22 target pistol with the long barrel. Pops and I had spent hundreds of hours with that gun, so the grip was worn smooth and the blueing was gone from the metal that had been out in every sort of weather.

Putting the jeep on four-wheel I ran down through the trees to a cut between the hills, then went along on foot through the darkening hardwoods. I moved slowly, evoking memories of Korea to neutralize the icy bite of the snow through my worn shoes. There was a flash of brown as a cottontail streaked from under a deadfall toward a rotting woodpile I'd stacked years before. My slug took him in the spine, paralyzing the back legs. He jerked and thrashed until I broke his neck with the edge of my hand.

I left him there and moved out again, down into the small marshy triangle between the hills. It was darkening fast as I kicked at the frozen tussocks. Finally a ringneck in full plumage burst out, long tail fluttering and stubby pheasant wings beating to raise his heavy body. He was quartering up and just a bit to my right, and I had all the time in the world. I squeezed off in mid-swing, knowing it was perfect even before he took that heart-stopping pinwheel tumble.

I carried them back to the jeep; there was a tiny ruby of blood on the pheasant's beak, and the rabbit was still hot under the front legs. I was using headlights when I parked on the curving cemetery drive. They hadn't put the casket down yet, so the snow had laid a soft blanket over it. I put the rabbit and pheasant on top and stood without moving for a minute or two. The wind must have been strong, because I found that tears were burning on my cheeks.

Goodbye, Pops. Goodbye to deer-shining out of season in the hardwood belt across the creek. Goodbye to j u m p - s h o o t i n g mallards down in the river bottoms. Goodbye to woodsmoke and mellow bourbon by firelight and all the things that made a part of you mine. The part they could never get at.

I turned away, toward the jeep—and stopped dead. I hadn't even heard them come up. Four of them, waiting patiently as if to pay their respects to the dead. In one sense they were: to them that dead farmer in the burned-out car was Murder One. I tensed, my mind going to the .22 pistol that they didn't know about in my overcoat pocket. Yeah. Except that it had all the stopping power of a fox's bark. If only Pops had run to hand guns of a little heavier caliber. But he hadn't.

Very slowly, as if my arms suddenly had grown very heavy, I raised my hands above my head.

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a *NEW* detective story by

NEDRA TYRE

An unusual and interesting detective story . . .

BACKGROUND: a social service agency

CHARACTERS: caseworkers, administrative staff, and others

ATMOSPHERE: persecution and resentment

MYSTERY: (rather, CASE): a thriller!

ANOTHER TURN OF THE SCREW

by NEDRA TYRE

THE ATMOSPHERE IN THE STAFF lounge of the Concord Social Service Agency seemed heavy with conspiracy and intrigue. Actually the whispers and furtive glances which the seated women made toward the hall door were signs of dismay and of fissures in morale.

Mrs. Watkins spooned more sugar into her coffee and began to give to the other caseworkers her usual 10:15 A.M. report on what she had overheard. She was not a congenital eavesdropper and had not previously paid the slightest attention to what had been said in the office next to her own. Recently however—to be specific, for the two months that Miss Prentice had been working for the agency—Mrs. Watkins had turned informer.

The agency's quarters were a remodeled townhouse and Mrs Watkins' office was formerly a small dressing room whose connecting door fitted loosely into the master bedroom, which had been converted into the Director's office. Random words from very loud conversations would sometime seep through to Mrs Watkins' desk, but if she placed her ear against the door, as she to her shame, now did habitually when the Director and Assistant Director had their daily con

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ference, she could hear every single remark with absolute clarity.

"I feel like a spy," Mrs. Watkins said. "I *am* a spy. But the things she says to her about her get worse and worse—more fantastic and inexcusable."

By now, in Mrs. Watkins' recitals, the three principals had all become "she" or, in the objective case, "her." Mrs. Rugby, the Director, was "she." Mrs. Matthews, the Assistant Director, was "she." So was Miss Prentice, the new worker. All the agitated listeners knew precisely to whom Mrs. Watkins referred in her inexplicit statement: the first "she" was Mrs. Rugby, the first "her" was Mrs. Matthews, the last "her" was Miss Prentice. It was as if Mrs. Watkins had said: "But the things Mrs. Rugby says to Mrs. Matthews about Miss Prentice."

"It's all so terribly unfair," Miss Sloan said. Next to Miss Matthews, who was the object of Mrs. Rugby's unprecedented persecution, Miss Sloan was the newest staff member. "I got through my first months here all right. I mean, there was no constant discussion of my weak points, no daily tearing my professional self limb from limb. I couldn't have survived if Mrs. Rugby had been half as critical of me as she is of Miss Prentice! A new person is naturally insecure and it's bound to take time to fit into a new routine."

Mrs. Green as usual bristled with indignation. "We're lucky to have Miss Prentice. It's not as if she couldn't get another job just like that." The snap of her fingers emphasized Mrs. Green's resentment. "Of all people, social workers can pick and choose."

It was then Mrs. Andrews' turn to comment. She sat next to Mrs. Green on the sofa and she set her coffee down so violently that it splashed onto the table. Mrs. Andrews' master's thesis had been titled *Manifestations of Covert Hostility;* she had written it hurriedly and much too succinctly and she had among her voluminous and unused notes all sorts of tidbits that she kept regretting she hadn't included; she liked to present one or two at such critical times as these morning coffee breaks. "None of this has anything to do with Miss Prentice really. It's all a matter of Mrs. Rugby's deep-seated resentment of Mrs. Matthews. Mrs. Rugby is furious over retiring in the fall no matter how much she's carried on these last two years about looking forward to freedom and having time to herself, and she's trying to find any possible excuse to make Mrs. Matthews, who is to succeed her, appear incompetent and muddling in having employed Miss Prentice. It's simply repressed hostility."

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With vigorous shakes of their heads and deep frowns they all acknowledged the obvious truth of Mrs. Andrews' remarks. Mrs. Moore, the next one to speak, did not offer her opinion in Mrs. Andrews' psychiatric terms. "Mrs. Rugby is plain mean and childish to talk as she does about Miss Prentice. I'd rather be a salesclerk standing on my feet eight hours a day and with sales tax to figure than be in Miss Prentice's shoes."

And though they were in one of the largest cities in the Middle Atlantic States, Mrs. Singer dug into the Deep South for a figure of speech when she commented. "I'd rather chop cotton from sunup to sundown than to be subjected to what Miss Prentice is facing."

While the reactions were verbalized in various ways, their tenor was identical: unanimous resentment. The facts were these. Mrs. Rugby was scheduled to retire within a few months after twenty-five years as Director of the Concord Social Service Agency, and Mrs. Matthews, her assistant for ten years, had already been named as her successor. Mrs. Rugby had attended a conference in New York for a week and had come back to find that in the meantime Mrs. Matthews had employed Miss Prentice. The vacancy had been long unfilled, the shortage of caseworkers was acute, and Mrs. Matthews had acted with the dispatch she had considered urgent since Miss Prentice had many attractive offers.

Returning and learning of Miss Prentice's appointment, Mrs. Rugby had said there hadn't been all that much rush about filling the position and that the entire matter could have been postponed until she got back. Her efforts since then had been centered on trying to force Mrs. Matthews to admit that Miss Prentice was incompetent.

Mrs. Calvin, next in line in that morning's ring-around-the-rosy, was noted for being romantic and dramatic and yet as shrewd as they come. "What's needed," she said, "in fact, the only thing that would solve this whole mess and prove that Miss Prentice has the resourcefulness and ability that Mrs. Rugby denies would be for Miss Prentice to do something spectacular—like rescuing a child from a burning building or overtaking bank robbers and snatching their loot or solving a murder that has stumped the police."

"But it would have to be in a casework setting," said Mrs. Andrews, professional to the end.

They all agreed with Mrs. Calvin. Her solution was the perfect one. It was inspired. But it could never happen. Not in real life. Fate was obstinate, not to be manipulated either by wishes or by necessity.

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Their spoken regrets over the perversity of fate were suddenly silenced by the sound of footsteps. They all looked up toward the door to see Miss Prentice, the target of Mrs. Rugby's criticism, enter the lounge. They couldn't treat her as one of themselves, able to fend for herself. Their sympathy for her and their outrage at Mrs. Rugby's behavior made them oversolicitious; they offered Miss Prentice peanut butter crackers, homemade cookies, fruit, coffee, cigarettes; the room reeked with false jauntiness and false bonhomie.

Miss Prentice refused their offers and inserted a dime in the soft-drink machine. She upended a bottle and they all watched as she gulped. She set the empty bottle in the rack where it rattled, and then she hurried out just in time to bump into Mrs. Rugby on the threshold. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Rugby," she said. "I'm so sorry." They all saw that it had clearly been Mrs. Rugby's fault.

Mrs. Rugby dominated the lounge. No one could think of a word to say. The silence opened great potholes of embarrassment into which they all fell. Then like nursery school children they greeted her in unison.

Mrs. Rugby went to the coffee urn to fill her cup and then she swept out with it.

"This is ridiculous," Mrs. Green said. "This situation has reduced us all to ninnies—acting like idiots when our newest staff member comes in and bleating like sheep when the Director appears."

"It's intolerable," Mrs. Calvin said. "But there's nothing we can do. We're helpless."

"Yes," Miss Sloan said. "The solution will have to come from either Mrs. Rugby or Mrs. Matthews or Miss Prentice. It's strictly in their hands."

Miss Phillips had not spoken until then. She cleared her throat and said, "I have a horrible foreboding that it will all end in blood and violence."

She might have been an oracle intoning a prophecy. Cymbals might have clashed after she had spoken. No one said a word. Almost ritualistically the women rose and then one by one they tossed their empty paper cups into the wastebasket and walked hesitantly, as if to a dirge, back to their offices.

When Mrs. Watkins gave her next and—though none of them at the time realized it—last report she was alternately blanched and flushed in her anger over what she had to relate.

"Exactly at nine she called her in and summarized her failings." What Mrs. Watkins meant, of course, was that Mrs. Rugby had called Mrs. Matthews in and summarized Miss Prentice's

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failings. "She said that Miss Prentice had no self-control—that in an emergency she would go all to pieces. She said Miss Prentice was unable to establish rapport with a client, that no one would want to unburden problems on her. She said Miss Prentice has no insight, that she isn't observant, that she has neither intuition nor common sense."

"What Mrs. Rugby wants," Mrs. Andrews said, "is for Mrs. Matthews to say *mea culpa,* to prostrate herself and ask forgiveness for dressing up in Mrs. Rugby's clothes, figuratively speaking, while Mrs. Rugby was away and daring to hire a new worker. Then on the basis of Mrs. Matthews' incompetence Mrs. Rugby will go to the Board and postpone her retirement."

And Mrs. Rugby would get away with it; they all knew that, for Mrs. Rugby had the Board in the palm of her hand. Years ago she had helped the Chairman's son through a sticky period of juvenile delinquency, and she had steered the Personnel Chairman's daughter through a time referred to delicately as "running around." The Board would do whatever their darling Ruggie suggested. They would stretch any of the rules for her. No matter that she was long beyond retirement age, if she decided to stay on as Director until she was ninety-nine a way would be found to let her.

"What did Mrs. Matthews say?" Miss Sloan asked.

"Well, you know she usually doesn't answer Mrs. Rugby's accusations. Her attitude is more of a mother trying to soothe an angry child. But this morning she said very emphatically and very coldly, 'I don't agree with you at all, Mrs. Rugby.' And Mrs. Rugby said, 'Very well, Mrs. Matthews'—you know all these years they've called each other Matty and Ruggie—"I'll have to prove my point to you. I'll make home visits with you and Miss Prentice this afternoon and I'll show you Miss Prentice's lamentable shortcomings.'"

The statement immobilized the women. Coffee cups stopped on their way to mouths. Matches midway to cigarettes burned so long they scorched fingers. Eyebrows were such sharply inverted v's that they almost disappeared into hairlines.

Miss Sloan was the first to recover enough to speak. "My lord, you don't mean that the three of them will go out together this afternoon!"

"Nobody could do casework with a Director and an Assistant Director at her elbow," Mrs. Green said.

"Something should be done to stop it," Mrs. Singer said. "I've never heard of anything so preposterous!"

The remainder of the morning

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was a shambles: clients in need of emotional sustenance faced caseworkers in even more pressing need. Lunches went uneaten, noontime errands were neglected. Miss Prentice's approaching ordeal was all that anyone could be concerned about. Someone learned that the first visit would be paid to a nursing home subsidized by the agency. This meant another turn of the screw. Miss Prentice must meet her trial with the nursing staff and attendants and other patients within earshot of her interviews with her clients.

At 2:50 the silent, apprehensive staff, their office doors open, their ears frenziedly alert, heard Mrs. Matthews say to Mrs. Rugby, "Are you ready?"

The caseworkers listened to the footsteps of the three departing women, then they crowded around the office windows that overlooked the parking lot.

The three women being watched paid no attention to each other as they walked toward the staff car. Once they had reached it Mrs. Rugby waved grandly to Mrs. Matthews and Miss Prentice to sit in front. As if one were the chauffeur and the other a footman, they crawled in as directed while Mrs. Rugby sat arrogantly alone in back.

Mrs. Matthews drove slowly and painstakingly as if she headed a procession of mourners and when the car rolled beyond the view of the watchers upstairs they shook their heads in dismay; more than one shuddered remembering Miss Phillips' remark that it would all end in blood and violence.

And Miss Phillips' forboding was fulfilled.

For the issue did indeed end in blood and violence on that mild afternoon in spring, but none of the caseworkers was ever to know the full truth—not even from the newspaper, television, and radio reports of the crimes and the three dead bodies and the efficient, indeed brilliant and remarkably swift action of the police.

The lips of Mrs. Rugby and Mrs. Matthews and Miss Prentice were sealed forever on the subject.

The appearance of the three women surprised Mrs. Allingham, the superintendent of the nursing home. "Isn't this an unannounced inspection?" she asked anxiously.

Mrs. Matthews and Miss Prentice waited for Mrs. Rugby to explain. When the silence dragged on uncomfortably, Mrs. Matthews said, "No. Not at all. We've come out to visit clients with Miss Prentice—just to observe—to *see* how she's getting along."

Mrs. Allingham *looked* displeased and unconvinced. "I don't remember that you've ever done anything like this before. Well, Miss Prentice knows where the patients are. She can show

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you around. I'm afraid there would be too much of a crowd if I came along with you. The afternoon rest hour isn't over and some of the people may be asleep, but go right along."

To comply with Mrs. Allingham's instructions Miss Prentice stepped forward, but Mrs. Rugby, unwilling to follow anyone, pushed past her. Miss Prentice said mildly, "Straight ahead, Mrs. Rugby, and to the left. Our clients are in that wing."

As if they were trailing royalty along the corridor, Mrs. Matthews and Miss Prentice kept a respectful three paces behind Mrs. Rugby and maintained that distance when Mrs. Rugby knocked on a door and entered without waiting to be invited in.

Suddenly her hands fluttered, then grasped melodramatically at her throat and forehead; she reeled backward and slammed the door shut. When she saw Mrs. Matthews and Miss Prentice looking at her questioningly, she strained to collect herself and faltered toward the next door. Her control returned; her hand was steady as she tapped on the door and thrust it open.

Again Mrs. Matthews and Miss Prentice, keeping their prescribed distance, saw Mrs. Rugby repeat her strange behavior. She gasped, her hands trembled, she staggered backward and jerked the second door shut.

With consternation Mrs. Matthews watched Mrs. Rugby. She felt compelled to try to account to Miss Prentice for their Director's abnormal deportment. "Mrs. Rugby must be having an attack of some kind. Or perhaps seeing clients is too much for her—it's been years since she's done anything but administrative work."

Once again Mrs. Rugby collected herself. She walked to a third room and made another entrance without waiting to be invited in.

Once more something inside repelled her; she withdrew as if routed, and having slammed the third door she clung to the knob as if whatever was inside might escape to destroy her; then she let out a shriek of hysteria.

Her wail aroused the entire nursing home.

Doors burst open. Patients in wheel chairs began trundling up and down the corridors. There was the clumping sound of crutches. Heads peered down stairwells. Nurses and attendants came running. From all directions voices yelled, "What's the matter? What's wrong?"

Mrs. Rugby shrieked one final shriek that silenced the nursing home for an instant. Then she began to gasp and mumble and Miss Prentice patted Mrs. Rugby's face softly and gently chafed her hands. Then she turned

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Mrs. Rugby's care over to Mrs. Matthews and walked into each of the three rooms from which Mrs. Rugby had retreated in so fantastic a manner. Miss Prentice remained longer in each room than Mrs. Rugby had; her response in no way resembled that of Mrs. Rugby. What she saw neither repelled nor upset her. Instead it left her concerned and pensive.

She looked across all the puzzled and inquiring faces to the superintendent and said, "Mrs. Allingham, please telephone the police. There have been three murders. Miss Grandison, Mr. Kent and Mr. Mabry are all dead.

The boldest of the onlookers rushed toward the closed doors to be stopped by Miss Prentice's quiet air of command. "I'm afraid no one can go in. I suggest that you all go back to your rooms and your posts and leave this matter to the police."

For an instant patients and staff rebelled and surged closer to the doors, and then they obeyed Miss Prentice's quiet authority. They saw that her suggestion was the only sensible course to take. The clogged traffic of the wheel chairs was soon eased as expert hands guided the chairs down the halls; the patients on crutches swung themselves back to their rooms and wards; the nurses and attendants returned to their duties.

Even Mrs. Rugby had somewhat recovered. Mrs. Matthews sitting beside her on the bench was heartened enough by Mrs. Rugby's improvement to whisper to her, "But, Mrs. Rugby, you said Miss Prentice had no self-control, that she'd be no good whatever in an emergency."

Mrs. Rugby shook her head and slumped deeper onto the bench. The tip of her tongue darted in and out of her quivering mouth. Whatever she might have been about to reply was interrupted by the arrival of the police.

They moved in like invaders, took immediate command, and strode with authority in and out of the bedrooms containing the three dead persons. The officer in charge, after introducing himself as Lieutenant Forsyth, addressed the three women from the Social Service Agency. "Who found the bodies?"

Mrs. Matthews nodded toward Mrs. Rugby. Mrs. Rugby pushed her face into the back of the bench and whimpered.

Miss Prentice said, "I also went into the rooms and saw exactly what Mrs. Rugby saw. As you see, she's very upset by it, but if it would help I'll be glad to tell you what I know."

"I'm sure we saw what you saw," the Lieutenant said. "Perhaps we saw and understood a little more since after all, crime's our business. What we're after now is the murderer—or murderers."

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"Why do you say murderer or murderers?" Miss Prentice asked.

"Because a multiple crime like this is usually committed by one person using one method. But in this case, as you must have noticed, one person was smothered to death, one person was strangled with a cord, and one person was stabbed. So it appears there may be more than one murderer."

"Poor harmless old souls," one of the policeman said as he walked over to the Lieutenant. "They had lived so long. It's a pity they couldn't have been allowed to live out peacefully whatever little bit of time was coming to them."

"They got the deaths they wanted," Miss Prentice hurried to comfort him. "Miss Grandison was killed by a jealous suitor. That's a wonderful death for an old woman, don't you think? And Mr. Kent told me when I was out here two weeks ago that he wished he could die suddenly, that he hated to see death creep up on him inch by inch. As for Mr. Mabry—"

But the glances of the police interrupted Miss Prentice. The Lieutenant shook his head, and the other men looked up from their various duties, shrugged, and might as well have said out loud that Miss Prentice had lost her mind.

Miss Prentice, however, only stopped long enough to catch her breath. Their skepticism did not bother her. "You see," she said. "I was their caseworker. I knew them all very well indeed. They told me about themselves, entrusted their secrets to me."

"Our job, young lady, is not to find out their secrets but to find their murderer."

"Well," said Miss Prentice, "perhaps I can help. You said a moment ago that in a multiple killing the same method is habitually used. Aren't smothering and strangulation very much the same?"

"Yes."

"Then that takes care of two of the deaths. And Mr. Mabry was stabbed."

"Yes."

"Couldn't it be that the murderer was murdered by one of the persons he murdered?" Miss Prentice asked her question with such conviction that the Lieutenant was either too stunned or too polite to contradict her.

"It was a lover's quarrel," Miss Prentice continued.

Disbelief bowed the Lieutenant's head.

"Just a minute, ma'am," he said. "That lady was seventy if she was a day."

"She was seventy-five last month," Miss Prentice corrected him. "I had a piece of her birthday cake."

The Lieutenant plowed on.

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"And the men were even older."

Again Miss Prentice proffered the exact figures. "Mr. Kent was seventy-seven in December and Mr. Mabry was eighty in February."

The Lieutenant seemed reassured by the information; Miss Prentice was enmeshing herself in her faulty reasoning. "Yet you say it was a lover's quarrel," he said. "That's a little hard to swallow."

Miss Prentice's smile was wistful; her tone was indulgent but firm. She said, "You see, sir, it's a mistake of the young to think that love dies in the old." Miss Prentice was in her mid-twenties, Lieutenant Forsyth a good fifteen years her senior; but her words seemed to reverse their ages. "Even though they were old, Mr. Kent and Mr. Mabry were still as ardent as schoolboys, and Miss Grandison was as much a flirt as if she were a teen-ager. She pitted the two men against each other, and in a jealous rage Mr. Mabry killed both Miss Grandison and Mr. Kent. During the rest hour today, while Miss Grandison was having a nap, Mr. Mabry went into her room and smothered her with a pillow; then he entered Mr. Kent's room to kill him—"

Lieutenant Forsyth held up his hand to silence Miss Prentice. He had had enough. He would finish Miss Prentice's story for her. He said, "And then Mr. Mabry, full of remorse over his double murder, returned to his own room where he proceeded to stab himself in the back—a physical impossibility with that long blade—"

"No," Miss Prentice said. "That wasn't it at all. The murderer was murdered by one of his victims. Mr. Kent was asleep when Mr. Mabry came in, but when Mr. Mabry put a cord around his throat Mr. Kent was roused enough to grab the knife he always kept on his bedside table, and he stabbed Mr. Mabry—I'm sure you'll find that there are no fingerprints on the knife's handle except Mr. Kent's. Mr. Mabry didn't realize that he had been mortally wounded—you'll find other cases where people mortally stabbed have still been able to carry on for a while. Well, with the knife in his back Mr. Mabry tightened the cord around Mr. Kent's throat until he had strangled him, and then Mr. Mabry went back to his own room where he collapsed and died."

The corridor seemed to resound with the truth.

Lieutenant Forsyth knew when he was lucky enough to have a solution handed to him on a silver platter. He looked with wonder at Miss Prentice.

To a man the Homicide Squad gawked in admiration at her.

"Of course you're right," Lieu-

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tenant Forsyth said. "That's got to be how it happened—it's the only way."

Mrs. Rugby began to moan. "I want to get out of here. I have to get out of here. Please, may I leave at once? Matty, you've got to take me home immediately. Officer, please, please let Mrs. Matthews take me home."

"Of course you may go," the Lieutenant said. "But I'd like to talk further with this young lady. I mean, I'd like for her to talk further with me—not that there's much else for her to say."

The men and Miss Prentice watched while Mrs. Matthews took Mrs. Rugby's arm and helped her rise from the bench and guide her toward the entrance. They all listened as Mrs. Matthews let two months of repressed resentment pour out. "But, Mrs. Rugby, you said that Miss Prentice wasn't observant. You said no client would unburden himself to her. You said she had no common sense. You insisted that she would go to pieces at the slightest crisis." Mrs. Matthews' voice was a lash of accusation, mercifully silenced when the front door slammed.

Mrs. Rugby ventured back to the agency one last time. It was the next day and a Saturday, so no one was around to watch. She took down her framed diploma showing that she had earned the degree of Master of Science in Social Work, and she took down her certificate showing that she was a member of the American Association of Social Workers; she took her three pot plants—a geranium, a cactus, and a maidenhair fern; she took her desk clock and her letter opener and pen and pencil set whose holder was inscribed with extravagant praise, a gift from the Board on her 20th anniversary as Director.

In her eagerness to leave the premises Mrs. Rugby did not say goodbye to anyone. She relinquished the glory of a farewell banquet and of testimonial luncheons and end-of-career interviews in the newspapers and on television. She dashed off a letter to the staff explaining that she felt it best to leave without fanfare. She moved to California which was as far away as she could get in the continental United States.

Mrs. Matthews made an admirable Director, as all the caseworkers had known she would, and things settled down happily and smoothly in the Concord Social Service Agency. But the staff did not for very long include Miss Prentice. Shortly after the three murders at the nursing home she handed in her notice to become the first woman officer ever employed by the Homicide Squad of the Concord Police Department.

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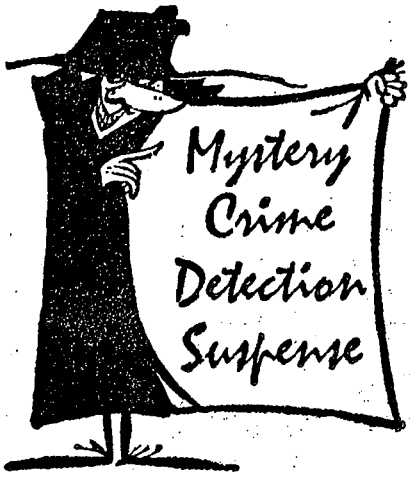

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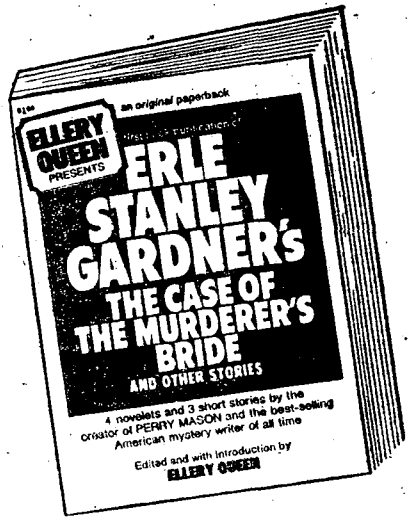
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